



Colombo, August 22nd 2008.

I climb into the front seat of the Hiace minivan and reach for the seatbelt - but there is none.

“No seatbelt?” I ask Shiraz, the driver who I have hired for the trip.

“No sir, you don’t need seat belt” his reply is con-

the vehicle and an Arabic prayer comes on, blessing the trip - he proudly tells me it is attached to the ignition, and comes on each time the vehicle is started.

Twelve Checkpoints, one elephant, and a day later we reach our destination, where I meet Raju, one of the contacts I made here from my last trip. He takes me to Nava-kuddy, to meet one of his neighbours, Rani - a woman with a wide, captivating smile. She lives in a tiny, one room shack with corrugated metal and Kadjan (woven palm fronds) walls, and a partial roof. She has no running water and “borrows” electricity from her neighbour by running an extension cord over. Raju tells me her husband, a carpenter, was killed



Rani and grandson.

fidant

“But what if we get into an accident?” I ask  
“Other than that, you don’t need it”

It sets the tone of things to come, and so we begin the 410 km trek to Batticaloa. Shiraz starts



An elephant blocks the road near Dambulla



Tuk-Tuks waiting for a fare in Colombo

22 years ago when he was caught in the crossfire between the Army and the rebels, as he made his way to work. With no compensation, and no other means of income, she supported herself and her two children by becoming a day labourer/maid/cook on an income of \$1.30 per day.

Rani asks me to build her a washroom, she



Rani's house



Rani's stove

We visit a few other homes in the area and select two more that also need a washroom. One of them has a woman with three children, she cooks

Stringhoppers (a breakfast staple) and sells them, making about \$2 per day. Raju and I quickly make plans and arrange for the construction supplies to be delivered. I

order enough supplies to build Rani's walls in brick, and finish off the tiling on her roof.

points shyly to a sand pit enclosed with Kadjan walls and tells me that has been their bathroom for all these years. She tells me that several NGO's and the Government have promised her a washroom over the years, but none have come through. Rani's son offers to dig the pit for the septic tank, if we can do the rest. Raju tells me a washroom costs about \$750 and I agree to build one for her. As we leave I

notice she cooks on a makeshift wood stove, and I ask Raju about it. He tells me she cannot afford a basic kerosene stove.

That afternoon I head for two orphanages in Kok-



Women carry bricks to build the toilet.



Kadjan enclosed toilets

kadichcholai - former rebel territory, now cleared and held by government and alliance forces. The countryside is desolate, rural and inhospitable. We stop at a boys home (Kathiroli) and a girls home (Shakthi). While they have had some success in getting aid, they are in short supply of books, shoes, and computers.

During the Displacement, when the Sri Lankan army pushed through and regained control of the area, they were all evacuated. When they returned months later, they found both orphanages had been looted.

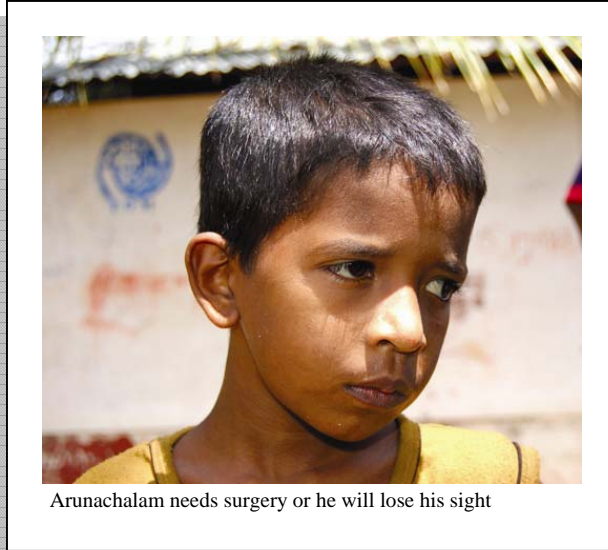
We get a shopping list from the Girls



The Ferry to Kakkadichcholai

homes and agree to meet two of them in town tomorrow afternoon. Unfortunately we are not able to meet the officials from the boys home.

Later that evening I talk with Kala - an English teacher. I want to set up regular English lessons for both orphanages, but Kala says most teachers will not go into the rural areas, for fear of their safety.



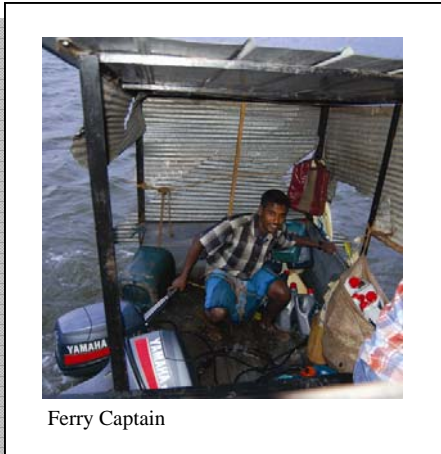
Arunachalam needs surgery or he will lose his sight

for goats and chickens, a water pump to help them farm, and seed money to start up a sewing center.

The orphanage is well managed and maintained, and most of the boys are away over the holidays, visiting their families. We then drive further north to meet Arunachalam, a poor bedraggled little boy who lives with

his poverty stricken parents in a very indigent area. He has had cataracts since birth, and has

The following day Raju and I start early. We go into town and buy Rani a stove, and check out the construction. Her son has already dug the pit, and they are waiting for delivery of the



Ferry Captain

bricks and cement. We then head north to Sittandy, and are joined by Bennett, an American living in Batticaloa who runs his own aid agency specializing in micro projects, and Sasi,

a Lecturer from the University, along with Murali, a student from the university - all of who are members of the Sri Lankan Friendship Society - an organization of very Intellectual people who handle projects that are funded from overseas. They work on a volunteer basis and don't charge any administrative fees. Kala - the English teacher is a member too. Sasi tells me their purpose with Sittandy Boys Home is to make it self sufficient. They want funds



Kokkadichcholai

lost the sight in one eye, and is about to lose the sight in the other one. The cost of the operation

is \$150 but his parents cannot afford it, as their income is about \$0.50 per day. I control my emotions and force a smile, yes - I tell him, I will pay for the operation.



Kathiroli Boys Orphanage - Kokkadichcholai

I rush back to town to meet the people from the girls orphanage and buy books, clothing,

shoes, sundry items, and a computer, before making the treacherous journey to Kokkadichcholai. The van gets stuck in the soft sand at the docks and has to be pulled out by a tractor, this delays us by



Under construction



the next trip.

an hour, and we have to get special permission from them to make the trek back as it will be after nightfall. They agree to hold the last ferry for us.

The ferry itself is a small flatbed of some leftover vehicle, with a hastily attached cabin outfitted with two 15 hp motors. It lists dangerously as we head out, and then the engine dies. I look around at the collection of bicyclists, motorcyclists, tuk-tuks (Three Wheelers) riders, and others - no one

seems worried that we are drifting with no power. It takes about 10 minutes to get the motor going again, and we all smile at each other as we make for the far shore.



The girls and trustees at the orphanage are very grateful, and we

are plied with soft drinks, sweet tea, and cookies, but make a hasty exit as the sun sets. It is nightfall as my driver eases the van onto the ferry, the headlights pick up five cows, whom we share the ride with. It is pitch black, with no lights at either port. My driver scrapes the bottom of the van as he disembarks, and refuses to use that route again, leaving us no choice but to take the much longer route through the back roads for

The following day we meet the two gentlemen who run the Boy's orphanage, Pushpalingham and Kamladash. They too are volunteers, and tell us that most of the NGO's don't want to help the orphanages, as the western belief is that children are better off in a home environment. But - they point out - the orphans are made up of children who have lost one or both parents in the war, others are brought there by Teachers or relatives, to prevent their parents taking them out of school at an early age - some as young as eight - to work in the fields. Yet others are brought there by their parents to prevent them from being forced into training as child soldiers.

They tell us of another smaller girls orphanage - about 20 girls - who also need supplies, as their orphanage was looted during the displacement. They have arranged for English lessons for all the children from all three orphanages, but cannot



Shakhti Girls Orphanage



\$3,500. They tell me that the three orphanages can share one, and it will be very helpful for them to bring food in, and take the children to medical and dental appointments. They currently have to rely on the almost non-existent transit system, or walk the 4 kilometers to the ferry. The smaller girls orphanage also needs 9 bikes for the 18 girls, to travel the few kilometers to their school. I tell them it will have to wait, as I am now out of money, but I pay for one year's worth of English lessons in advance.

afford the \$10 a week cost.

We start early the next day, with a quick visit to see the construction of the toilets. Rani is beaming from ear to ear, and thanks me again for her new stove. She carefully keeps it in her house, bringing it out only to cook. The bricks and cement have arrived and the masons will be coming by later to start work.

We then head back to Sittandy, to the orphanage to distribute some toys, and visit Arunachalam. I wanted to see him again and tell him that the operation is paid for, and give him a few toys. We pick up more supplies and return to Kokkadichcholai taking the long back roads. The potholes are like craters, and we go through five checkpoints. Throughout all the rural areas I notice an armed soldier every 500 meters, and I am suddenly aware of their 'shoot first' policy.

It is my last day here. I meet with Sasi who tells me that Arunachalam will be operated on within a day or two, and he assures me that he will send me reports on his progress. I then

meet with others from the SFS and say my good-byes. I stop by Rani's house. The toilets have now taken shape, and are waiting for the concrete to cure, before putting on the final top layer. She



smiles as she sees me, and asks me to sit at the table she has set out as she offers me a soft

We meet Pushpalingam and Kamladash and drop off supplies, computers and toys to the boys orphanage, and then hurry over to the second girls home to drop off supplies, computers and toys. They also need a water pump, and a tuk-tuk, the ubiquitous three wheeler, that can be purchased for about



drink. I know it's probably taken all her days income to buy the two bottles of 7-up. I take a few small sips and share the balance of it with her two grandchildren. Rani looks at me as she struggles with her emotions. She thanks me and starts to cry, and I find myself wiping the tears off my cheeks.



I ask Raju to look into finding a training program for her, either sewing or some similar trade. I promise her that, if she will take the training, I will pay for it, and even pay for a new sewing machine.

In all I raised \$10,700 with thanks to friends, family, clients, the agents and owners of Harvey Kalles Real Estate Ltd. Brokerage. I was able to supply three orphanages with computers, bought over 100 pairs of shoes, several hundred school uniforms/clothes, over 1,000 books, paid for an eye operation, paid for a new water pump, several goats and chickens, and gave start up money for a sewing centre, and built three toilets.



Oh yes, and I gave away over a hundred toys - because every child should have a toy.

There were no administration or travel costs, so all of the money you donated was used for the orphans and the poor.

Thank you.

Errol Paulicpulle.



Rani's new toilet