

Stories of

Transformation



*experiences of transformation
from development work*

Dr. Ravi Jayakaran

Stories of Transformation: (Volume-1)

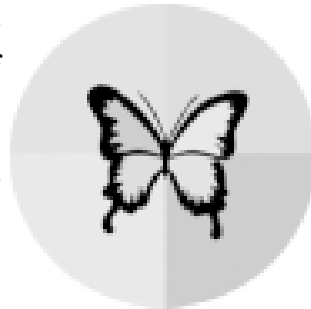
Stories of real life transformation during a career in development work



Dr. Ravi I. Jayakaran
Quality Professional Interfaces-GMS®

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those whom I have had the privilege of working with in the past many years that I have been involved in development work. It has been a long journey for me on this path of (even) beginning to understand what transformation is. I want to dedicate this book to the many people who have had major inputs into my life in enabling me to progress on this journey. Some of these people have been mentioned in this book. I want to also dedicate this book to those who are keen to learn and know more about transformation. As you read this book, if you are one of those, then this book is dedicated to you too!



Ravi Jayakaran

Foreword:

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To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I give all the glory for what is recorded in this book.

Ravi Jayakaran



INTRODUCTION

In every Country I have worked, after I have been there for some time, I get asked the same question. “How can so many interesting things happen in the life of one person? Are the stories that you tell us real?” My response to them is of course the same. “When you get to my age, you too will have as many stories to share!”

This first Volume of stories is a collection of some of those stories, and lest you wonder about them...all of them are true! Also the fact that this is only the first volume suggests that there are more to come.

While working on and planning this book, I have been conscious of the fact that the issue of Transformation is something that we really do not fully understand. The same situation and action cannot result in the same response from everyone. It is God initiated and facilitated, hence something way beyond us. Sometimes, God in His Grace involves us in that process, but we must always be conscious of our limited contribution to the results. I have therefore approached this issue from a different perspective. Instead of starting with a frame work like I normally am inclined to, I listed the first series of instances which I thought could be stories of transformation. Then, I studied

these to see what happened and looked for patterns. These patterns are what I present for you to draw your lessons from. I also encourage you to write down your own 'stories of transformation' experiences to learn further on the subject. The whole experience of writing these stories has been a very special experience for me, because I had to sit back and recall; and in doing that I was able to perceive more clearly some things that I had taken for granted when they actually happened.

I hope you will enjoy these stories as much as I have enjoyed writing them. If you enjoy them then give God the Glory. He is great and truly able to do more than we can ever dream or ask. I am eternally grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ for intervening in my life and changing it. I also have a word of advice for those who are not involved in any type of development work - 'Get involved as soon as you can. You don't know what you are missing!'

For those already involved in this type of work, may the Lord add many stories of transformation to your life too!

Ravi Jayakaran



TRANSFORMATION

Transformation and transformational Development are things that we talk about a great deal in Relief and development organizations. But, what is it? And how does it differ from 'Change'?

Without going into too many details on the philosophy of change, perhaps it is best to consider the discussions in the Participatory Poverty Alleviation and Development book (WVI-China publication, 2003, CD ROM, Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen University, Thailand, 2005) related to change. I mentioned there that change has three levels: In the *Circumstances*, the *Situation* and the *Structures* of the community. Of these three, the first two result in Transitional changes that can easily reverse when the external change inducing circumstances withdraw. However, when structures change, the process gets established and has long term impact. Structural changes are sometimes physical, but more importantly, they are embedded in the attitudes and perspectives of decision makers - the ones who establish and determine structures. When this happens, transformation takes place. It becomes permanent and irreversible.

What causes this to happen? Is it dependant on resources, or circumstances, or strategies? The debate can go on endlessly because

there are a multitude of examples that would decisively prove one or the other. *The interesting thing is that sometimes a moment's perception can change the perspective, resulting in a lifetime that is transformed!* This is not resource dependant, hence comes as an encouragement to all of us. We can thus each be an instrument for transformation irrespective of where we are and what we are doing. This is what I have tried to capture in this book through the stories I have shared.

Transformational development can be defined as 'progressive, permanent, God intended change'. In some restricted contexts I have defined this as, 'progressive, permanent, development to full potential', for this is essentially what it entails. Development to one's full potential. The representative picture here is that of the process of Metamorphosis in a silk worm's life cycle (something I am familiar with from having supervised several Programmes on Sericulture). After hatching from the egg, the 'first stage' silk worm keeps eating the mulberry leaves till it grows and grows and gets ready to molt. During this process it sheds off its outer skin and starts again its task of eating as the second stage worm. After a period of eating continuously the second stage worm further gets ready to molt again and after some more cycles of eating – growing - molting , it finally reaches the stage when it is ready to undergo radical change as a 'cocoon'. This is the stage when it looks like the least is happening externally, but after which it becomes distinctly different from all that it has been till then. Finally, the cocoon splits open to release the butterfly like adult which emerges to find a mate, and reproduce, thus completing its life cycle. When we look at the life cycle of this creature, we see stages where growth takes place. This is essentially one of size. Between the stages there is a quantum leap in the pace of growth, nevertheless the appearance remains similar for the worm till the 5th stage, after which there are major changes; in fact , the time when external signs are least apparent, internal changes are the most profound - during the cocoon stage, which at its end reveals the *totally transformed adult*.

Transformational development is a similar process. It is progressive, permanent, and results down the line in the revelation of the full potential, as in the case of the worm, becoming an adult moth. At early stages of the process the only development visible is lateral growth, and then suddenly there at the end is that great transformation!

I believe an important thing to remember is that it is our Maker's purpose and plan for everyone of His creatures to develop to full potential, but there is also a retarding process at work putting things into place that will by default cause this **NOT TO HAPPEN**. What is it that releases this potential? What is the formula for catalyzing the process? How do we ensure that it happens? The more I think about it the more I see how complex it is and how many things are involved. In this book I would like to try and just look at incidents when in my life I have seen those special moments of change take place (and in one case heard first hand how it did take place)...those moments of perception that have resulted in changes of long term perspective. I have tried to capture them in the form of individual stories of transformation, telling it like it happened, and highlighted at the end of the story what I believe is the lesson to be learned from it about transformation. As you read the stories they may appeal to you in the same way; or some other aspect of the story may touch you. Perhaps by the time you reach the end of the book you will be able find some other emerging patterns for yourself?

At any length, I do hope the stories will be an inspiration to you as you read them. That is what they have been for me in the past as I have recalled them.

The more I see transformation in the lives of people; I realize it is something that happens as we interface closely with people at the personal relationship level. In the "Facilitation of Small Groups" book, (WVI-China publication, 2003 / Mekong Institute CD ROM, 2006) I shared details of a technique called the DPP or Default Priority Profile. The DPP Index is a measure of the type of emphasis that is

placed by leaders who manage Programmes at the Regional, Country, or Project level. There are 4 levels that management inputs are normally concentrated on. These are (1) Strategy, (2) Management & Administration, (3) Programme implementation & Supervision and (4) Grass roots level interaction. Close involvement of the leadership is required at every one of these levels, but often one or the other is sacrificed in consideration of other priorities. The more I study situations where real transformation has taken place; I am convinced that this has happened when the Leadership has personally been concerned about what happens at the 4th level, the point of interface with the community - the Grassroots level. In large organizations, there has to be a great deal of relying on systems that involve the first three levels to ensure their smooth operation. This can ensure 'Change' while the program is in operation, which may well reverse back to the earlier position when the project is over. There is no alternative to personal involvement of the leadership at the Grassroots level to ensure transformation that is sustainable. In fact this is what will ensure that all the other levels are correctly poised to ensure that the interface is effective. *Grassroots level involvement of leadership shapes and ensures the appropriate emphasis of the rest of the organization to ensure transformation.*

Why is this so important? Because the delivery system must be subservient to the mission! For this to happen, the delivery system must be flexible to make room for exceptions. In order to ensure that the delivery system is flexible to exceptions, the leadership must be effectively interfaced with grass roots realities. Transforming agents have continuously demonstrated this in the past and even in our own life times.

I have noticed this in all of the cases that I share in this volume, and am convinced about its importance. However in the continuous attempt to become more and more sophisticated, if grass roots level involvement gets sacrificed, then the cumulative result may be disastrous!

This is where the ministry of Transformational development is so different from other forms of Project Management, where the involvement of the Leadership at the grass roots level is considered as being wasteful of management time, and it is considered to best leave it to the field staff. What we are talking about is not leadership involvement in the nitty-gritty of daily Programmes at the field level, for that would end up becoming micro-management; but an awareness and a demonstration, that, what happens at the field and grass roots level is very important.

When the leadership doesn't get involved at the grass roots level there could be various reasons for it. Sometimes it is because of transference of skills directly from another management role to a Programme or project with the assumption that the same principles apply. At other times it is plainly a lack of understanding or experience in the use of Participatory tools that allow for a down up involvement process that 'feed into' the system. This is tragic when it occurs in an organization. Today, most global organizations have ensured that they have equipped their leadership to be actively using appropriate techniques. Some have even gone to the extent of restructuring the entire organization to make it facilitative of the participatory processes. In my observations over the years, I have seen that sometimes the degree of transformation that are achieved even by small organizations far exceed that of larger organizations, that seem more concentrated on 'change', than on transformation! *When an organization, no matter how big its operations, begins to see that what it is achieving by way of impact is only "change", and not "Transformation", then it is time for it to re-examine its strategy and restructure its operations!*

I have tried in this book to use the "Observe-Study-Inference" (OSI) principle. I have studied actual events of transformation, and made inferences from these. The findings are then taken to be the principles of transformation. I have also recounted in this volume those stories of transformation. My basic assumption is that transformation is a "Default Intent" of the Creator. That is why I

have defined transformation as “Progressive, permanent God intended Change”. God intended for transformation to take place in all the people He created, and the scriptures make this amply clear. It is His desire that it happens. As development professionals, we should put all our energy and effort into facilitating transformation, and countering everything that intends to prevent it.

Based on observation, there are some principles that emerge in relation to Transformation, and I want to list these here below:

- o Emphasis at the Programme level can bring about change, but transformation only takes place when there are interactions at the relationship level*
- o Transformation is not resource linked, but it involves personal involvement and commitment which are costly*
- o Transformation is about one heart reaching out to another to establish a relationship*
- o Transformation takes place in those we least expect it to happen to, when we least expect it to happen, so don't give up!*
- o Transformation has to first take place in the agent of Change before taking place in those they serve*
- o Transformation is not merely a one time event, it continues to happen Progressively through out one's life*
- o If we are willing , we can each be an agent of Transformation*
- o Being an agent of Transformation is sometimes at tremendous personal cost*
- o Becoming an agent of Transformation involves getting involved and becoming vulnerable to hurt*
- o The agent of Transformation has to learn to be able to see the transformed person 'in embryo' and be patient with them while they have not been changed yet*
- o Transformation in the life of an individual is a chain of events: one sows, one waters , one weeds, another is there at the*

harvest...but transforming power lies at a higher level, giving the growth

- o Transformation is attitude and perspective change*
- o Transformation is time consuming, but at the same time can take place instantly!*
- o When we get involved in the task of Transformation, we slowly become aware of the 'big picture'.*
- o Transformation is Labor and time intensive, and requires persistent effort. If you are too busy to invest time and efforts on individuals, then you better quit this type of work!*
- o Transformation is about widening one's horizons of inclusion.*
- o Transformation is about changing one's mindset and worldview, and this often happens when a person gets convinced about something he or she has been resisting for a long time.*
- o Transformation is about breaking out of an imaginary world to see the real world 'up close'.*
- o Transformation is dramatic, Unique, 'Awesome' (as my older son Amit would put it)...and at the same time happening all around us and more often than we might imagine!!*
- o And, most important of all, God Himself is the Author and completer of transformation....we are merely instruments in His hands...so work as hard as you can, and leave the rest in His hands!*



3

THE TRUTH WILL ALWAYS OVERCOME

I sat opposite the old gentleman in white *Khadi* clothes and introduced myself as he found my name on the list and ticked it. “Very impressive grades” he said, looking up at me again, as he started the interview. On my part, I was not impressed. The notice board mentioned that the Founder Director of the Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF), Dr. Manibhai Desai would be conducting the interview himself. I had given my name as a potential candidate for the interview along with many of my colleagues just to meet this person whom we heard was a famous follower of *Mahatma* Gandhi. Now, sitting in front of him I was disappointed. Perhaps, this man was not the one. I had not expected the head of such a renowned institution to be dressed like a villager! My disappointment must have shown, for he seemed to be smiling a tolerant smile, and asked me about my favorite subjects. Well, since I was there, and he was asking about something I knew well, I answered him. At first the questions were simple, and I made sure I answered him, giving him a little more detail than he asked. The questions persisted, switching from Medicine to surgery, to Gynecology to Research, getting more and more detailed. I was now aware that this person in front of me

was as technical as I was, and was obviously enjoying watching me get confused at how much he knew. I was also conscious that the interview had gone on for longer than an hour, while the others had spent less than 10 minutes each. I sat back enjoying it, like a participant at a quiz competition anticipating the next question. As I recall, I was a young cocky person, prone to be proud and haughty in those days. I didn't expect the next question though. Dr. Manibhai Desai suddenly leaned forward and pointed at me. "I want you to come and work with me" he said. "What will you pay me" I retorted, before I could check myself. "About half of what any other organization will pay you", he replied, "Will that stop you from joining BAIF?"

Well, as things turned out, I had become sufficiently impressed with him as to want to join BAIF and be a part of the team that spearheaded an intensive development Programme for providing poor farmers a means to improve their livelihood status. That decision was significant in many ways because it moved me from a career path of Research to one of rural development. It was also because of the move to Pune to work in BAIF, that I met Vimla whom I married a year later. It was in BAIF, that my colleagues from the University and I had repeated opportunities to meet and interact with Dr. Manibhai Desai. He was a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, (whom everyone at the Foundation referred to as 'Gandhi Ji') and a strong advocate of his principles especially related to rural development. Gandhi Ji firmly believed in Labor intensive development. He also advocated for maximum development of existing resources before the introduction of new external resources, and this is what we followed as principles for development in BAIF. We were in those days moving into the second phase of that process, the enhancement and introduction of hi-tech systems in Animal Husbandry, Agriculture and Silviculture.

Dr. Manibhai Desai was an inspiring speaker, and as young enthusiastic idealists, we loved to hear him talk about his early experiences and struggles in starting off his work. One of my favorite

stories was the one about how he had met Gandhi Ji, and how he was inducted into the task of rural poverty alleviation.

The story went like this: The young Manibhai Desai (he was in his early 70 s when I joined BAIF in 1977) was a follower of the more 'strong action' freedom fighter *Netaji* Subash Chander Bose. He was a part of a group that constantly targeted the British outposts in India, attacking them and destroying infrastructure. His natural leadership qualities soon lead to him getting promoted to a position of leadership in the mission. He continued his work with the greatest of fervor, till even the British rulers in India became aware about him. Young Manibhai was soon on the 'wanted' list and had to go underground as the search for him intensified. He soon ended up in Maharashtra at a place called *Uruli-Kanchan*, at the Nature cure *Ashram* where Gandhi Ji was staying. (Gandhi Ji was in his late 70 s at that time). Here, Manibhai pretended to be one of the devotees at the ashram and stayed hidden from the British who were looking for him everywhere else. Gandhi Ji, however, soon spotted him because of the wild fire of hatred in his eyes and invited him to come and meet him. Thus began a dialogue between the Champion of non-violence and Manibhai who strongly believed that the only language the British understood was one of violence. They met every evening and dialogued. Manibhai refused to submit to the principle of non-violence that Gandhi Ji was recommending to him. Finally Gandhi Ji had to chide him with what seemed to be the inevitable consequence of his actions. 'Perhaps you don't expect the British to leave India...because if you did, then you would at least leave some infrastructure to be used by Indians!' On another occasion he told Manibhai firmly, 'even if you get the right ends by the wrong means, you will have to maintain the right ends by the wrong means!'

The daily dialogue continued often late into the night as they both walked around the ashram and talked. One day Gandhi Ji asked Manibhai to demonstrate to him how much he really understood about the needs of the oppressed and poor in India.

Eager to earn his respect Manibhai agreed. The task seemed simple enough. He was to go to the neighboring village from which the Ashram had got its name-'Uruli Kanchan', and by interacting with the villagers find out what their needs were. He went to the village the next morning, and returned in the afternoon. The problem of the village he declared to Gandhi Ji was that 'they were illiterate and stupid'. "A village of over a thousand people" replied Gandhi Ji, "and in half a day you have already understood all their problems? Is this how you will help make India a great and free country?" Manibhai was sent back to the village to meet the people, to talk with them and to get to really know them and their dreams. Thus began Manibhai's first journey in development. He returned to Uruli-Kanchan the next day, determined to demonstrate to Gandhi Ji that he was a true Indian at heart.

That evening, he failed to turn up for his dialogue with Gandhi Ji. Even the following day there was no sign of him. On investigating Gandhi Ji was told that Manibhai had been meticulously covering the village, talking with as many families as possible. He had not returned for food at the ashram, and had sent word that he would sleep at one of the village homes every night till his task was accomplished. A week passed, and there was still no sign of him. Then suddenly one morning Manibhai burst into Gandhi Ji's room, agitated and in a rage. "I have spent time with the villagers, and studied their village" he said as he entered the room. "Their problems are many. Their lot is very difficult. And above all this, almost the whole village is under debt...to a...to a money lender ...a *Pathan* who is crushing them under his heavy burden!" Gandhi Ji asked Manibhai to calm down, sit and talk, but he was very agitated and wanted to unburden himself of the information he had unearthed. The village lacked capital, and this had resulted in many of them taking loans from a group of *Pathans* (from the North Western part of British ruled India). Initially all the *Pathans* lived in the same area, and dealt severely with anyone who did not repay

them in time. The interest rate was extremely high, and failure to repay resulted in property being confiscated and the defaulter getting a sound beating with a cane. The *Pathans* were feared a great deal, and no one dared challenge them. In fact the fear was so great that in due course of time the rest of the *Pathans* just spread out over the whole region leaving just one of them behind in Uruli-Kanchan. The villagers despite outnumbering him many times over were too intimidated to dare challenge him. “Well, now that you know the problem, what is your solution for it” Gandhi Ji asked Manibhai.

“I need your permission” Manibhai said in a conspirational tone, “to use violence to rid the village of this man. I need your permission to use dynamite to blow up his house and scare him into leaving “. Gandhi Ji was surprised at the request. Not so much at the desire to use violence, as the fact that Manibhai was asking for his approval. He reminded him about what he had said earlier that ‘ends do not justify the means.

“Then what should I do?” Manibhai asked.

“Do you believe that you are in the right in opposing this man’s actions?” Gandhi Ji asked him.

“I believe it with all my heart...more firmly than I have believed anything in my life” Manibhai replied.

“Then let me give you a principle that you will find great success with” Gandhi Ji said, placing his hand gently on Manibhai’s shoulder. “The truth will always overcome....go and tell this man that you are on the side of the truth...that he is exploiting the villagers unfairly, that he is wrong in doing this, and that he must leave the village”

The mere impossibility of the task shook Manibhai. He was silent. He asked Gandhi Ji how he could possibly do that without a demonstration of the use of violence. “You cannot free this one village of an exploiter and you are planning to free India from British rule? I thought you were a brave man...but apparently you have no power except if you use dynamite” Gandhi Ji chided him.

Manibhai became silent once again, his head bowed. Then he stood up resolutely. He would do as he was challenged, even if it meant he would have to face the wrath of the Pathan. That evening he went to the village and shared with his new friends there the mission he was on. The villagers were too fearful to say anything. They knew what would be the outcome of such a crazy task.

The next morning as Manibhai walked towards the house of the Pathan, the whole village watched in silence. What a pity they wondered, that a young enthusiastic young man was venturing on a task that would probably get him maimed for life or even possibly killed. Each step he took towards the house was watched by the villagers through the partially opened windows and doors of their houses. Any moment now they expected to hear Manibhai screaming in pain..... (At this point the story needs to be stopped to go back in history and explain something that happened in the life of the *Pathan*. As other members of his group grew in wealth and power and were spreading out leaving him behind to oversee this particular area; the *Pathan's* father told him that the days ahead would be good for him. During these days he should make the best of every opportunity to make money. But a day would come, he was warned, when someone in the village would realize that there is power in numbers, and would rally the people together to challenge his authority. That, he was told, was the day to leave the village...)

As Manibhai walked, his legs shaky, and sweat running down his face, he had no idea about what had transpired between the *Pathan* and his father. He was walking towards what he thought was his death. The *Pathan* was a huge tall man well over 6 and half feet tall, almost a foot taller than Manibhai. He always carried around a huge cane with him, and never hesitated to use it on those that dared challenge his authority.

Manibhai knocked on the door. The door opened and the tall form of the Pathan stood towering over him. "Who are you? And

what do you want? “He asked. His heart pounding violently in his chest, his knees wobbling in fear, Manibhai said as loudly as he could, “You cannot exploit these people anymore; I have come to ask you to leave the village and go. I am on the side of truth and the truth will always overcome...” There was silence all over. Even the dogs in the street had stopped barking. The *Pathan* stood there, unmoving. Then turned and went in. Manibhai prepared his body for pain. He had to muster up all the energy he had in his body to keep from running away. A few moments later the Pathan returned carrying a big bundle. He walked past Manibhai on to the street. Then, looking back one last time, he walked down the road and was gone from the village.

Manibhai looked up. The blows he was expecting had not come. He looked over his shoulder and saw the *Pathan* walking away. Could it be true he wondered? Suddenly he was conscious of people on the street running down towards him. The whole village seemed to be there, and they were shouting out his name. Before he knew it some of them had grabbed him up and held him up aloft. All around him he could see people rejoicing. He could not believe what was happening. As they continued to hoist him up and shout, Manibhai shouted above their voices. “Stop” he shouted, “Please put me down”. The crowd became silent. They put him down. Manibhai walked through the crowd. Tears were streaming down his cheeks as he walked toward the Ashram and into the room where Gandhi Ji was staying. “Bapu (father)” he said in submission. “I believe what you said. Now command me to do what you want me to do and I will do it!”

Gandhi Ji sent him to work in Uruli-Kanchan. It was here that the Bharatiya Agro Industries Foundation (BAIF) was born and from where it was developed. In keeping with Gandhi Ji’s challenge to him it was here that Dr. Manibhai Desai stayed, living like one of the villagers he was called to serve. He stayed in a single room house, with simple furnishing, with limited belongings. He dressed like a



Maharashtrian farmer. Under Dr Manibhai's dynamic leadership BAIF grew to become one of the premier institutes in India for development in Agriculture, Bio Mass technology and Animal husbandry, employing thousands of Scientists and technical experts all over India. Over the years Dr. Manibhai received much acclaim for his outstanding contribution to Poverty Alleviation programs, including the prestigious Magsasay award. Till his death in 1993 he tried to uphold the principles of Truth

and development that he had learned from Gandhi Ji, and challenging every one he came in touch with to also do the same.

What are the lessons on Transformation from this story? One for sure is that Transformation starts with the most unlikely candidate for it to be a constructive process. But once established it can become a whole movement that takes on a life of its own. Secondly, every great movement of change, when traced back was initiated by a significant change agent; in whom the change had first to be initiated before it propagated. Recognizing and working with these 'key change agents' while they are 'in embryo' requires Vision, patience and perseverance. Finally, Principle Centered development is something that should never be sidelined. The foundations on which we build are what will uphold and sustain the Programme in the end!

At a personal level, Gandhi Ji has been a person whom I have admired a great deal. Much of that appreciation has come from personal accounts that Dr. Manibhai Desai shared with us about him. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount given by the Lord Jesus Christ were guiding principles for Gandhi Ji. The dignity of the poor and the 'spiritual clarity creating' capacity of Poverty were things that he understood very clearly. In many ways the poverty alleviation strategies he recommended and decentralized self-governance principles he recommended way back in the late 1940s

are only now being understood in development circles. If you want to understand transformation, I would strongly recommend studying the life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, or at least watching the movie that Sir Richard Attenborough made about him entitled "Gandhi".

4

THEN YOU ARE OF NO USE TO US...

“Young man” said the aging former Secretary General of the Indian Lok Sabha, placing his arm on my shoulder “If you can achieve this here in Bihar, I guarantee that you can work anywhere else in the World!!” I looked up into his face (for he must have been a good foot taller than me!) surprised at what he was saying, and also to make sure I was hearing things clearly. He had said almost nothing before that time. We had spent half a day visiting several projects and looking at the Programmes supervised by the organization that I headed-Krishi Gram Vikas Kendra. Earlier that morning, I had received a phone call from the Managing Director of one of the Companies that were part of the Usha Martin Group of Industries. Mr. Rana Pratap the MD had an urgent request. Someone in the protocol department had committed a *faux pas* by not ensuring that a representative sent from the Central government in Delhi was met by the appropriate protocol officer befitting his status. Apparently the person had also not arrived in time at the airport, resulting in Mr Avatar Singh Ricky , I.A.S.(retired) , and former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha, having to take a taxi to the Hotel. Understandably he was in a very foul state of mind, and I was being requested to meet him, and try to pacify his mood!

Mr. Rana Pratap had always been supportive of our work, and on several occasions 'gone the extra mile' in helping us. I therefore agreed to do this rather unpleasant work. I met the gentleman at his hotel, apologized on behalf of the company and asked him if would be interested in seeing some of the development work we had done in the Rural areas of Ranchi District. To my surprise he had agreed and accordingly we had spent a good amount of time in the village. At the end of the visit, and especially after the remark he made breaking his silence, there was a lot of pleasant conversation. He shared with me his early experiences in the Indian Administration Services. (This is a premier government service into which only the very best brains in the Country enter.) We discussed development principles, Idealism and balancing it with reality, government development programs especially the IRDP (Integrated Rural Development Program) and community participation in the development planning and implementation process. He had been extremely surprised that I was a Veterinarian who had broken out of a highly technical specialization mould into a more generalized integrated development approach. The visit ended with the development of a good friendship, and subsequently a healed relationship between Mr Rickey and my parent Company.

As I reflected on the discussions we had had during the course of that day, I realize how far I have come in my own personal journey in the development field. In my early days in development work I always took a very technical view of everything. Professor Supekar my professor of Medicine had once told me, 'Ravi, don't talk about the things that you don't know...but on the things that you do know, don't let anyone else talk!' I had followed this as a rule for my work. I pursued knowledge in my field of specialization to the point that I was absolutely sure of what I was doing. It is with this knowledge that I had moved to the state of Bihar to work in what was referred to as the 'tribal belt', populated predominantly by the Oraon and Munda tribes. Few people opted to work in the state of Bihar in those days. It was a difficult area,

ridden with corruption in government circles and was slowly becoming a disturbed area because of the brewing separatist *Jharkand* movement. Today the *Jharkand* state is a separate state with its own administration and self government. I had made a commitment to ensure that my technical services were available to the people whom I had gone there to serve, even in the most remote of villages. When I think now of how dangerous it was to be there in those days, I shudder. But I was young, and energetic and idealistic, and no sacrifice seemed too great! I went every where to talk about and propagate advanced animal husbandry practice as the best way for poverty reduction. I was excited about it. I felt my life had meaning and purpose. I was glad that I had moved from relatively stable and safe Pune to Bihar. I had been challenged well by Dr Manibhai Desai, and glad to put my learning into action!

On one occasion, after a particularly satisfying meeting in a village, I sat down under the shade of a tree, waiting for my assistant to answer some of the routine questions related to our *modus operandi*. An old villager came up and sat next to me. He told me he had watched and listened to me several times and had one question that he wanted to ask me. My attention perked up. I asked him what his question was. "Why do you always talk like ALL OUR PROBLEMS can be solved through Animal Husbandry?" he asked. I was surprised by his question. "Of course Animal Husbandry is the solution for the people of Bihar!" I replied with authority. It was what I believed with all my heart.

"No it's not" the man replied.

"Oh Yes? Then what is?" I persisted.

Now it was his turn to look excited. "Our greatest need is assured water supply" he said, "Give us water, and we will manage everything else". I thought about this, feeling very uncomfortable with this direct onslaught.

"But, I don't know anything about making water available" I replied feebly.

"Then you are of no use to us" he replied his eyes sad and distant.

I was not prepared for this. I felt completely shattered. Was this what I had made the great sacrifice of coming to Bihar for? How could this man be so mean and stupid, and unappreciative? Surely I was wasting my time here with these people. I picked up my assistant, who was completing his discussions with the villagers and we returned to the office. I realized that I was still very upset, so I requested my boss for leave and returned home. Vimla and the children were away in school so I had some time to brood by myself at home. I had left a great and promising career opportunity of technical specialization and come here to this backward state of Bihar only to be ill treated and insulted. I was really agitated with the old man. And then it struck me. He was only telling me the truth. Without knowledge on Hydro geology I was really not able to help them with their greatest



need. As I thought about it, I realized that what he was talking about was true. Without assured water supply the villagers were really nowhere. The summer months were very difficult in every way, even for the animals, that had to be walked a great distance to the water source. So what do I do now? Do I try and learn about ground water and how to access it? How do I start so late in life on this? And what happens to my technical expertise? I was glad I was alone, while battling with this. My wife Vimla had been supportive of my move to Bihar, and had always admired my enthusiasm for work.

How was I going to explain to her what had happened, and of what that old man in the village had said?

Somewhere during the hours of brooding a thought came to me. What if I decided to learn about groundwater? Surely it couldn't be that hard. I could read. I could meet people who were experts on the subject in Ranchi and learn from them. Suddenly the dark cloud lifted. I was excited. If I had really come to Ranchi to serve the poor

here, then, preparing myself to serve them should now be my greatest concern. I remember making a conscious commitment to do this in prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Almost immediately, there was a knock on the door. Who could it be? I had taken leave to come home, so nobody knew I was here. I opened the door to find Father Mark DeBrower standing there with a smile spread out right across his face. He was the Director of Development programming in Catholic Charities, and an expert in Ground water resources. Just the man I wanted to meet! I made an attempt to talk to him, but he was already determined to speak first. "I have been trying to contact you" he said, in his pronounced French accent "but when I *have* called to your office, they *have* confirmed to me that you are sick and *have* returned home". I let him do the talking. This was too much of a coincidence to be a coincidence! This was definitely divine intervention. As soon as I was ready to change my perspective, a provision was granted to me for learning. I decided to wait for Father DeBrower to finish what he had come to say before making my request. He told me that he had a special team of people coming in from one of the Remote Districts. They were all involved in facilitating Animal husbandry projects in their areas, and needed to get some intensive training on how to bring about greater improvement, as they planned a further intensification of their Programmes in all the areas where they had other development programs. Could I therefore give them a week's intensive training in Animal Husbandry?

I responded that I would do all that was requested, including giving them copies of a book that I had just completed writing at that time "Bovicare"(on Bovine care). In return I wanted something from him. To be taught everything that I needed to know in hydrogeology related to ground water and digging 'open wells'. "If there is one person here who can teach you all you need to know about water, it is I" replied Father DeBrower. "I have supervised the construction of wells extensively in the Chotanagpur plateau (the

region under which Ranchi District came) and elsewhere in India for over 25 years!”

As promised, I trained the team. They were people with good discipline, and listened intently to everything I taught them. Because of their keenness I was able to impart a lot more knowledge than I thought possible. In return Father DeBrower taught me about wells, about learning to see where I could find good underground water, about how to determine from ‘dug out’ soil consistency the water yielding capacity of a well. He taught me about Chotanagpur’ s unique hydro geological features especially related to open wells. Forty feet of soil, below which lay a thick layer of rock. It was therefore essential to have adequate water recharging facilities for wells by ensuring that adequate rainwater seepage took place. I saw scores of wells being dug. I met and discussed with villagers and those that were involved with digging. Because it was a topic I knew little about, I was able to learn from almost anybody and everybody. Every evening, I spent time reading all I could from the many books I got on hydrogeology. Having been brought up in the city, I had never seen an open well being dug before. Now I was seeing them all over the place. Within a few months I came to know all that was needed related to open wells. Unknown to me another preparation was going on for an even greater opportunity to open up for me. When I was confident about wells, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Ranchi District Mr. B.K.Sinha (I.A.S) wanted our organization to lead a program related to Dairy cooperatives. He contacted the Vice Chairman of the Usha Martin Group of Industries, Mr. Brij Kishore Jhavar regarding this and I soon got a call from him. “The DC wants us to lead a program related to Dairy cooperatives. But he has a condition. He wants us to first ensure that there is assured water available in the villages. Do you know anything about wells?” God truly moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform!

Thus began a new experiment and phase in my life. Chotanagpur had another strange feature. The soil type is predominantly Red

Laterite. This soil when it is dry is like stone, but when it comes in contact with water, it becomes extremely slushy and begins to crumble. The result of this is that when villagers start digging to make a well, and reach the underground water, the soil starts collapsing. It thus becomes very dangerous to get into the pit and dig. Subsequently it takes at least 2 years to make a well, and lots of resources. Our quest was thus to make a well in a very short time. If possible within a month!

During my reading, I had read about how wells were made in a place called Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh, where because of the Marshy nature of the sub-soil, wells were made by sinking concrete rings. I shared this with the villagers. One of those involved was the old man who had first admonished me regarding the need to break out of my mould. We referred to him as *Mangru Oraon ka Babu Ji* which means the 'father of Mangru Oraon'.

We tried out various models using plastic rings and soon had what looked like a working model. I contacted some of my friends in the city who manufactured concrete rings used as joint material for the water supply pipes. We soon had a volunteer who was willing to try it out on his land. In the month of May ("Jeth" as it called locally), we began our effort with the 'experimental cement ring well'. Every evening we had a meeting to discuss the next step. Many things went wrong. The skeptics came by to chide us for trying something as crazy as this. I was often asked if I had ever seen such a well myself. I had to say I hadn't but was convinced it would work provided we created enough opportunity for water seepage and storage. When we reached the level where the mud started collapsing, and the rings started getting inserted, there was immense interest in what was happening. Many of those who came to watch us actually came to watch what would go wrong. As the rings started getting sunk into the ground and the soil remained firm however, attitudes started changing. Some of the critics themselves came up with some very constructive ideas. One of these was to use irregularly shaped stones

all around the rings to allow the water from lateral seepage to get stored. In just over 21 days the well was completed. Mr. B.K. Sinha cancelled another schedule of his to come and see the well. For a long time he just stood at the spot as the entire village got there to tell him how it was achieved. He wanted to have a video made of how the well was constructed, and intended to have it shown at a special meeting for all the Block Development officers of the District and the technical staff. I was to talk at this special seminar, and it was to be followed up by a visit to the site!

The seminar was a success. If it works, the participants told me, after I showed them a diagrammatic design of the well; it would be the answer to many problems. As a surprise, I showed them the video. People became impatient to see the well and 'check it out' for themselves. One of the Hydro-geologists from the Central Mine Planning and Design institute Mr. Agarwal looked at the design and told us it was a unique design, because the irregular stones on the periphery of the rings was conducive for 'differential permeability to allow the ground water to flow from the dense soil to the less dense stone layer and finally into the central storage! What an appreciation of Indigenous Technical knowledge!

The field visit was even more successful than the seminar. At the end of it, Mr. Sinha took me aside and told me the government would support the construction of wells to all the people we nominated. Not only that, they would also make the area a special demonstration model for all the government Integrated Rural Development Programs. Thus came to be developed what was referred to as the "Rukka Model". Rukka was the name of the village where we made the first well. It was like a dream. Changes took place as never expected. We developed a way to make pre-fabricated cement rings locally in the village. This in itself became a small cottage industry. Almost all house holds in the village developed their Agriculture and Animal Husbandry capabilities. The village achieved loan payment rates that were unparalleled. Families were repaying their

loans within 6 months when they had to do it in 6 years. Many, who had left the village to work outside, returned to become farmers again. The changes were so clearly visible. A dairy cooperative developed, and became a model in itself, completely run by people who had been condemned by others as being 'incapable of helping themselves'. Many of the Political leaders came to visit the place, so did the World Bank team. The model was replicated in the area and became a training ground for probationary Administrative services officers who came to South Bihar to work. There were changes for me too. My company Chairman and Vice-Chairman came to visit the area. Shortly after that I was promoted from Departmental head for Animal Husbandry to become the Chief Administrator and head of KGVK, the NGO that my company supported.

Mr. B.K. Sinha became a personal friend, often seeking my advice for development in other areas. Whenever a delegation came to Ranchi from the World Bank or the Central Planning commission, I was always invited to be a member of the discussion group. A few years later, he was promoted as the Principle Secretary and special advisor to the Home Minister in Delhi. One incident from that period particularly comes to mind. A new Deputy Development Commissioner was posted to Ranchi. His name was Mr Sudhir Kumar Jain. For the first few days of his orientation, this young dynamic officer was left with me by Mr BK Sinha, who told me to show him what matters for the upliftment of the people of the Region. Sudhir traveled everywhere with me in my car, as I visited the villages in our cover area to see the work. Everywhere we talked to people, they said the same thing about their greatest need. It was water. Seeing Sudhir with me people assumed he was one of our staff, because he did not have the characteristic 'air of authority' that people with his power displayed. Thus they talked freely with him, even talking about some of the frustrations of dealing with the beurocracy. By the time Sudhir took over his new post, he was also convinced about what his mandate would be. He made the construction of wells his top priority, and

worked at gearing the entire government machinery to achieve this. Later, there was special program in Delhi to which Mr. Sudhir Kumar Jain went to represent the Region. One of the items in the agenda was about a special fund for wells. Understandably, when a call went out to know who would be interested in the fund, Sudhir's hand went up. Bihar received a special allotment for 25,000 wells! In the years ahead he remained committed to his vision for making water available. The involvement went way beyond the District of Ranchi to other Districts in Bihar where he was posted in later years!

I often get asked the question regarding what the ideal qualifications of a change facilitator are. Years ago I used to say the perfect combination is a 'Jack of all trades who is also the Master of one'. Today I would modify that. "A Jack of all trades, who knows where the required specialists are". The key to effective facilitation of transformation is flexibility. It is essential to be 'open' to change, to new perspectives, to new ways, to ways that we are not familiar with, or not comfortable with. Often, in pursuit of a career plan, we seek areas of involvement that will further this goal. Our finite minds are so limited that we can never comprehend the 'big picture' for our entire life; a consideration that the Creator always takes into account when He orders the steps of our lives. Today, Animal Husbandry is a very small part of what I do. Does that mean the education and specialized training I received were wasted? Not at all! Those principles come into use in all my thinking processes, during 'diagnosis' of a situation or 'prognosis' of an outcome or 'pathogenesis' of a persistent uncorrected situation. My training has shaped the way I think, and made it relevant to what I am involved with.

I want to conclude this chapter with another incident that took place while I was still in Bihar during early 1990. A former class mate Dr. Umesh Kumar Garg from the University where I had studied rang up one day. He was now an Associate Professor he told me, and had come to Ranchi on a special assignment for his Post Doctoral research. He was very keen that we meet and have a meal together. We fixed a mutually convenient date, and I told him that he would have to

accompany me to work and some visits that I had to make, but we would have plenty of time to catch up in between. He was agreeable and I picked him up at the University and we drove to my office which was about 20 KM out of the city. The initial conversation was related to what various class mates were doing, and their families. Then as my work day started, he quietly followed me around asking occasional questions about the Agriculture research we were doing or about Horticulture or Sericulture. Our Campus was like a mini demonstration farm of all that we were doing in the villages - Low cost housing, Animal Husbandry, non conventional energy, afforestation, soil conservation, dry land farming etcetera. We went to attend a village meeting; we had discussions with the river lift irrigation team. I also had an emergency discussion with some of my field staff during which I left Umesh in my office and gave him some of the literature we had produced to read. By the time we were able to break for lunch it was already close to 4 PM. We drove down to a place called Mesra which was half way between the office and the city. It was a restaurant that catered to people traveling on the highway and could have a meal ready in less than 20 minutes. As we waited for the food to arrive Umesh started talking. "I was actually very keen to meet you because I was told that you had completely abandoned your technical expertise, and we were all concerned that you had wasted your life away", he said. I was surprised that my classmates still discussed me. I had no idea how they heard all these things, for I had completely lost contact with them after I joined BAIF. "Do you think I have wasted away my life?" I asked him. He broke into a smile as he replied me. "Wow, I envy you and the impact your life is having on people. I think what you are doing is very special. I can see how happy and satisfied you are. Our lives in the University seem so drab in comparison, always working at a computer or peering into an electron microscope."

Our food arrived and we ate it silently as we were quite hungry. Once we had eaten and started back for the city, the conversation once again went back to University days and the fun we had had. I

was surprised at how some of those who had never intended to be in the teaching profession ended up as Professors; while some of those like me who were expected to stay in Research had moved to the field and got involved in some pretty grass roots kind of work. We were soon at the University guest house and I was getting ready to say goodbye to Umesh. As I got back into my car after shaking his hand vigorously, he stuck his head close to the window. “You know what; you’ve done some great career planning for yourself”

I looked back into his eyes. Interesting that he had asked that question. “Do you remember “I replied “During our junior year all



you guys used to make fun of me because I had started believing in and following the Lord Jesus Christ? Remember I told you all that I had started trusting Him even to lead me in matters of choosing my future options. Well, it was He who guided me in choosing my life

partner, and He who brought me to Bihar. It is He who did my entire career planning for me!”

A follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is often in a strange position. In matters related to one's own future, the options are, 'Not my will but Thine'. And when it comes to matters of community development, it is, 'Not our plans, but theirs'. For after all, Participation is not about the community participating in our programs, but US participating in their programs. It isn't easy to set aside our agenda to promote theirs, but one thing I have learned is that when I have put the poor first, then the 'One who cares for the poor has taken care of the rest- Planning, Preparation and Provision!'

5

TELL ME IN 5 MINUTES

“The Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission (R.K.Mission) Ashram - Swami Atmavidyananda Maharaj wants to meet you when you are free” said the representative from the R.K.Mission in Ranchi as I opened the door. “Please let me know when you can come”. I told him I would be there in half an hour, and sat down to think about what the issue might be. *Swami Atmavidyananda Maharaj* was the head of the R.K.Mission in Ranchi. Besides the religious aspects covered under the Ashram, he was also the official head of the *Krishi Vigyan Kendra*, which was a village development program that had extensive development programs in Ranchi District. They had been good supporters of our work, and had assisted in training our first batch of villagers in farm management.

When I reached the Ashram, I was ushered into the office of the Secretary. Several people were waiting for him in the adjacent office, but I was taken straight past them. As I sat down, still wondering about the purpose of the meeting, he came straight to the point. “I saw the circular message you sent out some time back” he said, “Please tell me in 5 minutes what this PRA-PLA is all about”. This was not what I was expecting, and so I hadn’t enough

time to prepare mentally to explain to him in such a short time. In fact, even if I had time to think about it I guess it would not have been possible. However, I did try and explain, and at the end of it he seemed more confused than before. “You mean to say that with all your experience, you are still saying that the villagers know better than you what is best for them? What contribution are you then going to make to their welfare?” Perhaps I had been too ambitious in sending out that message to the head of all the institutions in Ranchi, asking them to give me a few moments of their undivided attention to listen to details of this new approach called PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) or PLA (Participatory Learning and Action). A few minutes later, I was finishing off the cup of coffee that I was served, and was saying goodbye. I had failed to convey the information I had intended – in 5 minutes!

But, the challenge remained. If the approach we had been using was to have an impact, then I had to find a way to convey the information to the busy heads of institutions in a short time...even in 5 minutes if it was actually possible! Thus began the effort of writing, rewriting, chopping and editing! Then in 6 months, with a wide selection of pictures, I finally had what was required. A document that took only 5 minutes to read, and did in fact convey what PRA/PLA was all about. Meanwhile, I had been able to mobilize a team from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra to make one of their remote villages available for field exercises for a team from UNICEF in Delhi that we had trained in the use of Participatory development programming. This training workshop had been extremely successful, and the UNICEF had made a video about it called ‘Learning to Unlearn’. Some of that feedback must have got back to the Secretary, because when I called on him again to show him the draft of my book entitled ‘a 5 minute guide to the use of PLA’ he was quite ready to give me time. This time however, it was negotiable. He asked me how much time I would require to convey to him all that he needed to know about PRA/PLA. He had already read all the documents

that I had shared with the participants of the training program I had facilitated, he told me. I considered everything carefully this time. I was not going to make a mistake again. “I need at least 5 to 6 hours of your undivided attention” I told him, “and I would like to show you examples and use the Over Head projector (OHP) to do this.” He looked at his calendar and we fixed a mutually convenient date. Because of the possibility of being disturbed in his office, he opted to come to my home and make arrangements to bring his office OHP along with a generator if required. (Ranchi was famous for regular power blackouts). I knew immediately then that his interest was genuine. As the head of the RK Mission he was a very high profile person. I had often seen very senior government officials and Industrialists waiting patiently outside his office for a brief meeting or receiving a ‘darshan’ which is essentially to be ‘in his presence’ and receive a blessing. I knew for a fact that he rarely ever visited anybody’s home, but here he was; ready to visit the home a person who wasn’t even one of his devotees!

We made all the preparations for his visit. My wife Vimla rang up a couple of people she knew who were members of the RK Mission to check up related to what would be the appropriate diet for the Swami Ji and on the appointed date everything was in perfect order. I rang him a day before to let him know that we had prepared for him to have tea and Dinner at our home. When he arrived at our home in the R.K. Mission jeep, I told the assistant that I would drop him back along with the Over Head projector and the portable generator. We soon had everything set and were ready. Vimla was back in the kitchen, in a bit of a flap as she worked feverishly to get things ready. She always believed in making sure that visitors to our home were well fed and taken care of. After we finished the snacks and tea, she retreated to put things away, leaving me to start my sharing.

I got ready to start the presentation. I had reviewed all the slides that I had intended to use and had calculated that if I spoke

fast enough, I could complete all I intended to say in just less than 5 hours. Swami Atmavidyananda Maharaj asked me if I was ready to start. I told him I was. Then he asked me where I would stand to make my presentation. I showed him where I would stand next to the Overhead projector, under the impression that he would like to station himself on the sofa strategically without me blocking his view. However, as soon as I showed him, he moved to the floor and sat down close to where I was standing. “If I have to learn from you” he said “then I must sit at your feet!” He had already sat in *yoga Asan* that was used for intense concentration. I knew there was no point in arguing, so I started my presentation. Half an hour later when Vimla came back into the room she was shocked to see Swami Ji sitting on the floor. I had to take a break to explain to her, that it was the Swami Ji ‘s own desire! Except for the break taken for Dinner, I spoke non-stop moving from slide to slide pausing to see if more time or explanation was required. At each point I was urged to proceed.

After dinner, Vimla again tried to persuade the Swami Ji to sit on the sofa for the rest of the session, but he insisted that that was the only way he would be able to absorb all that I was teaching. Every moment of this was a lesson to me too as I observed the way this very important and prominent man was conducting himself. Throughout his time with us, he had referred to Vimla as “*Mata Ji*” which means ‘mother’. Vimla on her part was first offended , but on his explanation that he held all women who were married as mothers and all unmarried ones as sisters, accepted the title and proceeded to ‘mother’ us with her care!

I can scarcely remember another similar situation with a ‘disciple’ so willing and devoted to learning. I knew from the questions he asked and the corrections he sought that he was absorbing every word that I said. To have a person listen so intently is the dream of every Facilitator. I did not have to pause or break, to regain attention. And I certainly didn’t need a break for myself! I was talking about

something that I loved dearly- Participatory Poverty Alleviation and development. After about 5 hours of talking, I had completed all I thought was necessary to convey. At the end of my talk I saw the Swami Ji's eyes light up. "When can you spare time to train ALL our staff?" he asked me. "You tell me the dates that are convenient for you, and I will change our schedule to match yours".

I looked at my schedule and gave him dates. True to his word, he rearranged the schedules of his organization to ensure that every staff was available to attend. I spoke in Hindi while facilitating the sessions and made provision for people to stop and ask questions anytime. In a weeks time a whole organization was able to realign itself to make itself a Facilitator of Participatory development, rather than an *instructive transferor of technology*.

What were my lessons in Transformation from all of this? Firstly, that if something is important, then, it is worth waiting for the opportune moment to find enough time to adequately explain the issue to the person who could ensure that change takes place. Secondly, that while transformation takes place when interactions are at the grass roots and relationship level; the impact can be widespread when decision makers at the Strategy level are influenced. Finally, That I still had a lot to learn about being humble and learning from others despite all I preached about being "open", "seeing things differently" and "learning"!!

I left Ranchi a few months after that to move to Chennai and work with World Vision. Before I left, I became a very good friend of the people in the R.K.Mission Ashram and the *Divyan Krishi Vigyan Kendra*. I took a special session on 'effective communication' for some of the team leaders, and the Swami Ji particularly became a very close friend. Years after I left we still wrote to each other once in a while appraising each other about changes that had taken place in our work situation. After I moved to Pune in Western India, I lost touch with him. But whenever I have spoken about Servant-leadership, I have thought about him and the many lessons I learned from his 'modeling of it' to me so many years ago!



6

USE MY UMBRELLA

I waited patiently in my office for the arrival of the owner of the *'Punjab sweet house'*. He was an extremely prosperous businessman and was referred to as *'Badé Seth Ji'* which essentially being translated means 'big business man'. Well, I was keen to meet this big business



man because his establishment was now the biggest purchaser of milk from the 'Village Milk Producers' cooperative' that I had helped set up. I was keen to make sure that in keeping with what was his own best interest he would not betray the cooperative down the road and switch to another milk supplier who would sell him milk cheaper. This was a common practice of the 'sweet houses'. (For the

uninitiated, a 'sweet house' is a place that buys raw milk and converts it through value added processing into sweets. For some reason we Indians love sweets, and it ends up as a part of our daily food. We've got to eat sweets at the end of a meal! I guess that accounts for the fact that nearly a quarter of the world's diabetics are Indian!). The farmers' cooperative was selling thousands of liters of milk daily to

this gentleman and it was for the large part of it, pure cow's milk! It was not easy to get the 'Seth Ji' away from his work. He owned a chain of hotels and restaurants, and the Punjab sweet house was his main supply line for all the sweets. If you had a wedding or a special celebration in Ranchi, you had to buy your sweets from 'Punjab sweet House'. 'Wow, these taste excellent, are they from Punjab Sweet House?' Sometimes you just had to say "PSH". Even the villagers had started using that as a quality standard like the ISO 9001 rating. 'Do you know who our biggest purchaser is? PSH!'

It was not easy to get him to leave his station. He didn't trust quality control to anybody else. *He had to do it himself*. So I had to find a business option to get him interested. I offered him a chance to get some special bio-intensively (organic) farmed vegetables. We had been conducting a lot of research in this type of cropping. I invited him to come and see if he was interested. Well it got his attention alright, and I was now waiting in my office to meet him. When the 'Seth Ji' finally arrived, he was profusely apologetic for being late. He was a millionaire several times over, but had great respect for educated people. He genuinely felt sorry for keeping me waiting. I assured him that it was perfectly alright, and then took him around our campus. We had a beautiful 50 acre campus that was situated 20 K.M. away from Ranchi city. It had been developed by the collective efforts of my team, but most particularly the hard work of my Senior Agriculture Officer-Mr. Muruli Dhar Pandey. The campus served as a research and demonstration farm where we tested out everything we introduced in the villages through our extension program. When I took over as the head of the organization, I told my team that we must only do that which is of practical relevance in the villages. In those days about a third of the campus land remained fallow during the summer season (there were three agriculture seasons in that part of the world-The monsoon, winter and summer crops). There was no point talking about intensive agriculture in the villages for maximizing land utility if we couldn't

practice it on our own campus. Pandey and the others took up the challenge and very soon had the whole campus under cultivation the whole year round. It was an intensive strategic plan that was involved. Dividing the campus on the basis of water availability and considering cost of irrigation in the non-rainy season. I gave them a free hand to develop the area using any technology they wanted as long as they kept a record of cost of preparation and input-output ratios so that it was cost effective. In less than 2 years the near impossible was achieved! There was not a single patch of land on the campus that remained without use for any season. We used flood irrigation, drip irrigation, sprinkler irrigation, dry land farming, Silviculture, Agro forestry and a variety of combinations of mixed farming on the campus. The efforts soon became known to all the people in the area. The Vice-Chancellor of the Birsa Agriculture University was a frequent visitor to our campus as also many technical experts. We were proud of our efforts and showed it to everyone who came to visit us. Today I was showing it to my guest. He was enjoying every moment of the visit, admiring the quality of the crops. He was originally from the state of Punjab which is very well known for its improvements in Agriculture.

After the visit we went back to my office, and I showed him some of the photographs of the village too, prior to the development interventions. He was silent as he leafed through the pages of the photo album. Later as we drove to the village in his van, he told me how his family had also been extremely poor when they migrated to Ranchi from his home state in search of better options. I was surprised that this man who was literally floating in money talked about his own poverty. We were soon in the village, and met by the committee members of the cooperative. I was proud to see how they had grown in confidence as they boldly welcomed us. They took the lead in specially welcoming the milk purchaser to their village. I stood back and watched them as they talked with him. The 'Seth Ji' was a huge man about 6 feet tall and, I would be tempted to say, at least 3 foot wide. He was dressed in a loose fitting 'Kurta' and white 'Pajamas'.

He stood like a White Goliath, talking to the members of the milk producers cooperative, none of whom were over 5 foot 4 inches in height. (I knew that for sure, because they were all shorter than me!) Yet it was so encouraging for me to see them hold themselves up as they talked to him. I heard them describe the background of the village, pointing how the dam on the river Swarenrekha had resulted in most of their Rice fields getting submerged. The villagers had thus been left with very small land holdings that had yielded very little crop. However, now with the access that they had to assured water supply from their individual wells and their cattle, most of the villagers had sustainable livelihoods. Despite the fact that none of them had been Dairy farmers they were all now successful at it and had learned a great deal about their cattle. They specially mentioned how they had gone about searching for places to sell their milk and finally identified Punjab Sweet House (PSH) as the most valued purchaser.

I could see the owner of PSH get interested as they took him from house to house, showing him the small dairy unit that each house had, the 'bio gas unit' that supplied fuel in the house and ready to use fertilizer in the form of 'slurry'. It had been a few days since I had visited the village, and I too could see the major changes that were taking place all over. Each household had a small vegetable garden in the backyard and they were not only selling milk and vegetables, but also consuming it at home. The improvement in their standard of living was also obvious. Every home was able to afford electricity, and almost every home had a TV and other assets. Children were going to school, and everyone was better dressed. Of course, a village group had also been monitoring to see how much each family was able to save to ensure that with the increase in income, no body squandered it on Alcohol. This was an additional responsibility that the milk producer's cooperative had taken on, considering the fact that alcohol abuse was a major problem in that community. Our earlier intention had been to spend about 45 minutes in the village

and then return to the office, where I was to be dropped off. However now, it was already almost 3 hours that we were in the village. Each family it seemed wanted to invite the *Seth Ji* to drink tea with them (a common custom in that part of the country). I was surprised that he willingly sat down outside each home and drank the tea offered to him. I noticed dark clouds gathering overhead. It would soon start raining. The cooperative members excused themselves to go off to their homes to feed their animals in preparation for the evening milking. On his part the *Seth Ji* didn't appear to be in any hurry to leave. Perhaps the visit here was bringing back memories of the past, I thought. I decided to lead him to another section of the village.

We were a little away from the van which was parked near the entrance of the village when it started raining. As typical of the region, the rain started suddenly and literally started pouring down. We rushed towards one of the houses, and then I discovered to my horror, that there was no way in which he would be able to get through the narrow doorway. I prayed fervently to the Lord to stop the rain, but it just continued to pour. What a horrible way for the visit to end I thought to myself. I had even forgotten to bring an umbrella. Fortunately, each house has a roof overhang to prevent rain water from wetting the mud wall, so we tried to crouch under it. While I managed to do this, I noticed that the *Seth Ji* was still considerably exposed and getting wet. Suddenly, from one of the houses, an old man emerged with an umbrella and handed it over to the *Seth Ji* "Please use my Umbrella" he said as he stood before us getting wet himself.

We stood there like that for a few minutes. Me crouching under the roof overhang, the *Seth Ji* trying to protect himself to the extent possible.

The rain cloud moved and we had a brief respite from the rain. We returned the umbrella to the villager, and ran back to the van as it started raining again. As we drove back to my office, I could see that he was very moved by all that had happened. When we stopped at my office, he was struggling to speak. I didn't realize till he cleared

his throat several times, how much emotion had been involved. Finally with some effort he spoke, “I never realized how much the milk business I did with these villagers impacted their lives. I want to promise you one thing. No matter what happens, I will never let them down.” He paused for a moment, then, turning away from me so that I could not see his eyes, he spoke again, “If ever, anyone from



this area needs help.....any help, please let me know”. I waved him goodbye as I got down. Thankful that in fact the visit had turned out well. Perhaps the sudden rain was as a result of divine intervention. Was it that little act of care from one villager that reached out to this hard core business man? I will never know for sure. In the months and years ahead, he was true to that promise. We never had to go to him

for the special help which he had offered, but he faithfully arranged to collect milk every single day, twice a day without fail. Being an area that was in the heart of the ‘Jharkand agitation’ , Ranchi was often under what was referred to as a “*Bundh*”, or a strike where all traffic and movement comes to a complete standstill. Not on any single occasion did the van from Punjab Sweet House fail to come to the village. I don’t know how he managed to do it, but he did.

In the years since then, I have met many people like that. With a tough exterior, and an apparent ruthless outlook of life that seems devoid of concern for others. They have seemed like the very last people to care, yet have been the first ones to respond when asked to help. They have often given more than we dreamed possible and done it consistently. I personally believe that at some stage or the other they have come to a point in their lives when they have made a commitment to God to help others and do so ‘when given the opportunity’. I have learned that no one is beyond reach, and that every heart can be touched and turned by human need, to become transformed and be a resource for further transformation!



RAMESH

Of all the stories I have shared, perhaps the one most shared, has been the story of *Ramesh*. Despite this, even now, as I write it, I feel excited and can feel the goose bumps on my skin. Again it is a story that involves Mother Teresa, and I had the privilege of sharing it with her. She in turn, quite typically, said she could not remember the specific experience, because she had met several people like that! Well, let me not run ahead with my story. Let me start at the beginning, and share with you how it all came about.

In the mid eighties, I was still working with the Usha Martin Group of Industries in Bihar. With my team, I was in the process of revamping the organization to make it relevant to the needs of the local communities of *Oraon, Munda, Mahtos* and other people groups who were small scale farmers. We were in the process of studying as many different approaches as possible, and testing out new means for subsidiary income generation. I had just returned from a trip to one of the North India states studying their Animal husbandry Programme, stopped over in Delhi to see a special project where someone was introducing high producing 'Italian honey bees', and was at the Delhi airport waiting to catch a flight back to Ranchi. I

remember that I had hurried to the airport to catch my flight only to be told that the flight was delayed. In those days, for reasons best known to them, the airlines had the practice of announcing only a delay of one hour at a time. When it got close to the time of the rescheduled time they announced another delay! I had just heard this, and was irritated getting back to the waiting room when I saw an old friend from my student days - Dr. Vishal Mangalwadi. Vishal is a well known activist, contemporary thinker and prolific writer. He and his wife Ruth had had a great deal of constructive input into my life as a student, especially my spiritual life. I was glad to see Vishal and now, the delay in the flight didn't seem like such a bad idea, as I could catch up with what he was doing.

Vishal too was waiting for a flight, and introduced me to a friend of his, who was waiting for her husband to arrive on the flight that Vishal was planning to catch. We found some vacant seats, and gave each other a quick run through on what had happened in our individual lives since we had last met. Then Vishal told me about the lady who was waiting with him. She was, he told me, the wife of very big business magnate. Her husband was the one who owned (as part of his many businesses) the dealership for a major brand of soft drinks for the whole of North India. However, this was not the thing that was special about her, Vishal told me, but that she was a person with a very big heart. I listened silently, nodding in accent, waiting for more details. Thus began a most unusual story-The story of a lady, her husband and their incredible experiences. I am sure I was told her name, but the incredible details that followed, drove that from my memory.

The lady and her husband had a son. And as was expected, when he was born they gave him everything he wanted. He was brought up in the lap of luxury and his parents loved and adored him. In fact their love and devotion was so strong toward him, that they feared that at some stage if they had other children, they might not love him enough. Thus, both of them took a decision to get a

'family planning' operation done so that neither of them could ever have children again! They would love their son with all their heart, and do for him all that was physically possible. The boy, understandably, grew into a spoilt brat, often insisting on his own way, and demanding for things. The parents on their part, danced to his tune, pampering him and giving him everything he wanted. Their whole life revolved around him. When he was twelve years old, he demanded a special birthday present from his parents. He wanted to take a pony ride in Kashmir. His wish was of course, their command. So the father called his office to make the bookings, and informed his assistant that they would be away for the week in Kashmir (in those days it was not as politically disturbed as it is now).

The family was soon off in Kashmir, taking trips on the Dhal Lake in *Shikara* boats, and pony rides alternately. On one of the days, as their son rode a pony on the mountain road, a truck turned the corner and blew its horn. The sudden sound caused the Pony to sprint, freeing itself from the control of the pony owner. It ran uncontrollably, tripping over the barricade and into the valley below. The parents who were following him ran in fear looking over the side of the road. Way down, hundreds of feet below laid the pony and the boy. They ran down the hill screaming and fearing the worst. When they finally reached the spot, both the Pony and the boy were dead. The lady clung to her son's lifeless body and wept uncontrollably. Nothing anyone said could console her. She clung to the body, refusing to let it go, and had to be sedated as her husband made arrangements for them to fly back to Delhi where they lived.

'Time', her husband was told, by one of those who came to the funeral, 'heals all wounds'. But this was not apparently so in their case, because every night his wife had to be sedated, and only woke up again weeping the next morning. Both of them were shattered by the loss of their son, but the wife seemed to show no signs of recovery from the event. The husband tried everything, even hiding his own grief, but to no avail. Finally, in desperation, he remembered that

his wife had a classmate living in Calcutta who was very close to her before they married, and he rang her up, and requested her to come and try to help her friend. With the arrival of the friend, there was a new round of weeping. In her bid to console her weeping friend, she had inadvertently suggested to her to take heart because they could have more children. She was of course not aware of the decision her dear classmate and husband had taken, not to have more children so that they could give their undivided love to their only son. Now, with him gone, they were apparently hopeless. With the utmost caution, she told them about a project that she was involved in, back in her hometown Calcutta. She was a regular volunteer at Mother Teresa's *Shishu Bhawan* where they worked with abandoned children, including helping them find foster homes to get adopted into. To every one's surprise, the idea caught. The lady suddenly stopped weeping - the first time in days. She suddenly seemed to have a new hope and purpose in life. She wanted immediately to go to Calcutta, and meet Mother Teresa, and ask her to immediately give her a child to adopt. She would shower the child with all the love in the world and never let it ever feel abandoned. Her husband was relieved to see that she had once again found a purpose for living. He was willing to support any effort that would help the healing process for his wife.

They were soon off to Calcutta on the first available flight, and after some quick phone calls, had an appointment to meet with Mother Teresa herself. Mother listened to all that the lady had to say as she shared why she wanted to adopt a child and that too as soon as possible. When she had said her piece, Mother looked at her with great admiration, telling her that she was a person with an incredibly big heart, capable of immense love. She however said she wanted the lady to do something for her before she gave her a child to adopt. She took them inside the *Shishu Bhawan*, past all the infants and little babies to meet a slightly older child. As soon as she entered the little girl got up and hugged her. "This child", Mother said, "has been here with us ever since we found her abandoned. She was born

like this, with a distorted face. No one wants her because of her appearance. No one wants to take her and get her treated and operated to repair her features. Every one wants to get a perfect child. “She paused a moment as she held the little girl close to her heart.” I can see you are a person with immense love. I want you to at least help two children like her before you take a child to be your own”

The lady spoke to her husband over the phone. With his consent, they took the little girl back to Delhi. They had soon contacted leading plastic surgeons around India. The girl went through a series of operations to have her face restored, and in a short period of about a year shaped up to be a beautiful girl. This time her husband joined her as they took the little girl to show her to Mother Teresa. Mother was pleased as she saw the child. When the lady asked her for a child to be given to her immediately to adopt; Mother Teresa reminded her of her commitment to help two children. This time she took them to see another child. The boy’s name was Ramesh, and he was a little over two years old. Ramesh was an unfortunate child whose Father suspected him of having been conceived illegitimately by his mother. One day in a drunken fit, he had grabbed the little boy and thrown him in a well. The little child sustained countless fractures as he fell. He was in constant pain and kept groaning. Even breathing was an ordeal for him. His greatest misfortune was that he had survived the fall. Even the doctors felt it was futile to do anything for him. There simply were too many fractures. “Restore this child”, Mother said, gently patting his hand, “and I will give you the child that you so greatly yearn for”

The couple went back with the child, strapped to a special stretcher, and a nurse taking care of him during the journey. For two years they had taken him from hospital to hospital, from one expert surgeon to another. Because of the immense wealth at their disposal, they had been able to give him the very best treatment available anywhere in the country. In the early stages, she had fought with one or two doctors who had told her she was wasting her time on a child who at best

would become a cripple. She had known what it was to lose a child. She had known how desperately she had wanted to see her son in his broken body restored to life. She knew the value of life, and how precious it was. There was nothing that was ever going to stop her as she worked to help restore Ramesh to wholeness. I listened to this incredible lady, absolutely transfixed. What incredible love, what determination! I was also suddenly conscious that the announcer was calling passengers on my flight to Ranchi to check in. I cleared my throat, wishing there would be another delay of my flight. “I’ve got to ask you something “I said.” What is it that has kept you going all this time, facing all these odds and hurdles with Ramesh’s treatment?” She was surprised at my question, and seemed to ponder over it a moment. Then with an amazing gleam in her eyes, she looked straight into my eyes and said something that I will never in my life forget “Dr. Jayakaran, I have seen a Vision of Ramesh running, and God help me, I will not stop till I see that become a reality!!”

Those words still ring in my ears after so many years. I have shared this story with well over a thousand people over the years. On every one of



those occasions when I have shared it at a meeting or a workshop, I’ve had people come over to me moved to tears, wanting to share how that story had inspired them to persist with something that they had given up on. Personal example is a trigger for transformation. Seeing someone first hand persisting against all odds can inspire, motivate, and completely change the perspective of people. Trace back from a place where

you have seen transformation, and you will be sure to find a highly motivated individual as the cause for it.

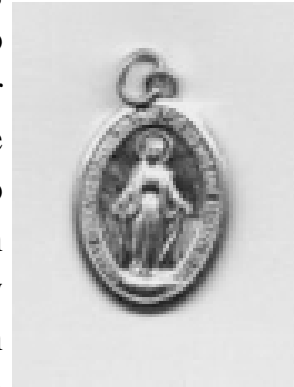
Ask God to give you a Vision of the transformed community He has called you to serve.

8

I AM NOT ASHAMED TO BEG

A colleague and I were returning from Bangkok to India. The flight was on *Indian Airlines*, and involved first getting to Calcutta and then catching another flight from there to Chennai. Though a round about trip, it was worth it because the cost was far less than other airlines that flew straight from Bangkok to Chennai. We had checked in early and were then informed about a delay in departure. The announcement also asked all passengers to collect their lunch coupons for free lunch at the Restaurant. We were not too concerned about the delay as we still had a long lay over at Calcutta airport. We had lunch and returned to find that this time the flight was in fact going as rescheduled. We were also very happy to see that there was a very special passenger on the flight - Mother Teresa! Indian Airlines Corporation (IAC) had made a special provision for Mother Teresa. She was an honored guest who was allowed free passage on any Indian Airlines flight for life. Today she was already seated in the first row of the A320 Airbus, and as the passengers entered the aircraft, she gave them a beautiful smile and greeted them with a 'Namaste'. It was like a special treat for everyone. The delay of the flight was forgotten as the whole mood in the plane seemed to change. As the plane

taxied off towards the runway for take off, the Captain broke protocol to speak the words of welcome over the PA system, “Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my proud privilege this afternoon to inform you that our honored guest on this flight is Mother Teresa!” His announcement was greeted with a round of applause and cheering. A little later, as the flight took off, they also made some arrangements for Mother to say a few words over the PA system. Besides a greeting, she also said for those not eating their lunch (we had all been given additional lunch packets) to donate it to the ‘Missionaries of Charity’. As the ‘fasten seat belts’ sign was switched off, there was a steady stream of people walking to the front seat to greet her, and give her their lunch packet. As I looked around, everyone seemed to have saved their lunch packet to donate it! The air hostess soon came up with an announcement to request people to wait till they disembarked and were at the luggage collection hall to give Mother Teresa the rest of the lunch packets. The remaining journey was uneventful, except for little snippets of information we kept overhearing from around us about the ‘Missionaries of Charity and their work.



I must have slept off, because I was suddenly woken up as the airhostess came around asking that we keep our seats upright. We were beginning our descent into Calcutta airport. As we alighted from the flight, the excitement once again returned to all the passengers. There were volunteers to do all sorts of things, including carrying the many packets of uneaten lunch that had already been donated to Mother. The rest followed quietly with their packets of lunch waiting to give it to her. I noticed also then several of them had taken out other food and sweet packets to donate. We waited patiently along with Mother as she and another sister who was traveling with her collected their bags. It turned out that several trolleys were required to carry all the ‘packages’ that Mother had

brought as part of her check in baggage. “They are donations of old clothes from the wonderful friends in Thailand” she said. Again there were many volunteers to push the trolleys with her checked in baggage, and all the donated lunch packets. The big group moved towards the customs counter. I feel sorry for the staff that was on duty that day. I wondered how they were going to handle the situation. We asked Mother if she had any customs related documents for the parcels she had brought from Thailand so we could clear it on her behalf. All she had she said was a letter from those who had collected the clothes for her. They had also paid the extra baggage charges and she had that slip with her.

Understandably, the customs people were in a quandary. How were they going to let so many parcels through? It was already beyond the authority level of the persons on duty. They had no option then to ask that Mother wait till they called their supervisor. Our group of passengers was agitated. Didn't they know who she was? Yes, they did, who in Calcutta or for that matter India didn't know who she was? But what were they to do? They were bound by the rules they said. The passengers however were unimpressed. ‘Are you going to make Mother Teresa wait?’ they insisted. In the mêlée, someone announced that everyone would protest and wait till the matter was settled. There was a big crowd now of more people joining to find out what happened. Mother Teresa on her part requested people to proceed and let her wait behind, “your families will be waiting for you, please go ahead. I have time, I can wait” she said. My colleague and I were standing next to her as she waited sitting on one of the trolleys (there were no chairs around). We still had a long time before our next flight. We told her we were from World Vision and she said she knew about us. I observed that she had been quite bold in her request for people to save their unused lunch and donate it to her. She looked up at us from where she was sitting on her luggage trolley unmoved by all the confusion around. “I am not ashamed to beg” she replied, “after all it is not

for me, but for those who are without food.... and I have never seen anyone refuse!” For a long time, I thought that was, as applicable to Mother Teresa. Who would refuse her?

After about half an hour the Top person from Customs arrived. Seeing the crowd, he was profusely apologetic. He requested Mother Teresa to accompany him to the VIP waiting lounge while his deputies cleared the consignment. She on her part said it was perfectly alright for her to wait with the consignment. They soon had an office swivel chair available for her to sit on. I thought to myself, that somewhere someone is standing up in his office without a chair to sit on! Within a few minutes the consignment was given a quick check and cleared. We were soon outside the airport waving her goodbye as she traveled in a van that was waiting for her. As we moved from the International airport to the domestic terminal,

waiting for our next flight, I thought about what had happened. *Here was a woman of International stature, who had demonstrated to us her utter simplicity and humbleness. She had no airs about her. No pride. I learned an important lesson that day about ‘begging on behalf of the needy’. It was something I found very hard to*

do, but learned with practice. When we finally launched our own fund raising program, I practiced what I had learned that day and saw the results. People gave without hesitating or holding back. We never lacked when we ‘begged’ on behalf of the poor!



9

IF I HAD PARENTS WOULD I BEG?

The meetings in *Atteville* were going well. It was a week long International workshop on Child Survival Programmes supported by the USAID and was well represented by delegates from Integrated Child Survival Programmes around the World. It was a good thing that the organizers had chosen a holiday resort at a considerable distance from the city of Bangalore. There was no place to go in the evening after the sessions, so delegates were attending all the 'poster sessions' and the special seminars. They were also spending time with each other, discussing and sharing-learning from each other and developing friendships. I too made several good friends during that time, with whom I have stayed in touch over the years.

On the evening of the 4th day, a special arrangement was made to take the people who were interested to visit the City. Almost everyone opted for the trip. I had intended to go along to be able to make a quick trip to my office and check the mail and sign a couple of documents that needed my approval. The bus dropped us off at the Brigade Road in Bangalore city, and was to pick us up again in three hours. I made a quick dash for my office, completed my work and returned to the pre appointed spot just as the bus was pulling

in. Seeing the group of foreigners as they tried to get into the bus, many street children had gathered around them begging. As I joined the rest getting into the bus, it was clear several of the delegates were uncomfortable with facing the begging children. Here we were, attending a child survival program in a developing country. How do you avoid responding to an obvious need? Some of them decided to do the most obvious thing. They reached into their pockets and took out some coins and gave them to the children. Like a dam had burst, there was another onslaught of more street children who seemed to come out of nowhere. Those delegates who were left outside the bus were literally surrounded. Some looked extremely disturbed as the children grabbed their hands begging for money. I was angry at the situation and myself for not warning them in time, and pitched in to try and bring some order to the chaos around me. One of my newly made friends was about to give a bunch of notes to a little girl carrying a baby. I stopped him and encouraged him to get into the bus instead as also the others. Perhaps that was all they needed to get them going. In a few moments they were all inside the bus, and most of the street children had dispersed.

The little girl with the baby who had almost got the money was now staring angrily at me. “Why did you stop him from giving me the money?” she asked coming over to where I was standing near the bus. I was still angry at what happened and responded almost with an accusation “Your parents send you here to beg from foreigners and then misuse the money”.



The statement came out before I could stop it. I was quite surprised at my anger, and even the statement I had made. I had no reason to

presume such a thing about them. The girl looked straight into my face. "If I had parents would I be begging?" .She had a pained look on her face, but the statement was a matter of fact, not an attempt to explain something to me or even convince me. She had turned and was walking away; clinging to the little girl she was carrying who I realized was definitely her sister, because they looked alike.

I called her back. My anger had vanished. Her words were still ringing in my ears. How could I have been so insensitive? I began talking with her. Perhaps the change in my expression had made her willing to talk. She told me how her family lived in the village, and how they were farmers. When her older sister got married, her father had to borrow money from the money lender. When he couldn't repay he had to sell his animals, and the family soon fell into greater debt. Their father started drinking heavily and soon fell sick. One day he became very ill, but they didn't have money to take him to a doctor. In desperation their mother called the local village witch doctor to do what he could but their father died. From the time the Father died the mother became very sick and had serious fits of screaming and shouting till a day came when she too died. The two girls had come to live with their older sister who was living with her husband in a slum in the city. He was an unskilled laborer with just enough income for his family. Upon the pleading of the elder sister he agreed to have the two girls stay temporarily with them, provided they worked somewhere to take care of their own food. That is what they had been doing that evening...begging to get enough money for food.

Back in the bus we were waiting for one more people to return. He had just arrived and the driver was asking us all to get into the bus. I took out my wallet and found a currency note higher than I had ever given to anyone before. As I gave it to the little girl, I made her promise that she would immediately use some of it to buy food for herself and her sister. I reconfirmed the name of the slum where she said she had come from, and got into the bus. I moved towards

the back of the bus and sat in an empty seat. As things happened, I ended up sitting next to the very person whom I had stopped from giving the little girl money. “You are a strange guy” he said. “You stopped me from giving her money, and then you gave her a lot more than I was giving!” I told him what had transpired in the conversation with the little girl. Several of those who were sitting around us got drawn into the discussion all the way back to the Resort where we were staying. We talked about beggars, and dealing with begging. About what the appropriate action was. About what a ‘hand out’ was and what a ‘hand up’ was. Some of those who were traveling in Asia for the first time were understandably very upset with the whole issue. As the bus moved along and we ran out of ‘development rhetoric’, we each settled back into our seats, lost in our own private thoughts. *There was always a point in real life beyond which the theory stopped making sense!*

Later after the workshop was over, and I returned to the office, I was surprised to see a message related to an expansion of our work in Bangalore City. One of the support offices we were working with was keen to support the expansion of the program in several new slums. Could this be a ‘special provision’? I wondered.

I called for a meeting of the Program Manager Mr. D. Vijaykumar and several of the Project staff. We checked out the slum that the little girl had mentioned on the map and saw that it was in quite a strategic location. When the reconnaissance team went to make its first survey, I accompanied them too. Somehow, the sequence of events had worked in such quick precision that I had expected to walk through that particular slum and see the little girl and her sister. However, neither during that time nor in the years that passed, did we ever come across them. There were many like them, some in even more desperate circumstances. When we launched the program, we were always conscious of this. We decided to serve as many as we could, providing them with an alternative and hope so that no child from that area would ever again have to stand before a stranger and beg for money!

In the years since then I have thought much about beggars and my response to them. Baba Ampte, a leading social activist in India, is well known for his service among the lepers. On one occasion, a group of Journalists visited a leper colony where he was working. One of them was very offended to see that the lepers in the colony were expected to work to cover their food costs. “How can you make those without fingers work?” he asked Baba Ampte.

Baba Ampte had an interesting response for him. “When a man has his dignity” he said, “He will work even if he has no fingers. But when he loses his dignity, he will beg even if he has all his fingers intact!”

What is it that causes a person to lose his or her dignity? Sometimes it is when desperation emerges from a situation with no other alternatives. When we came to Cambodia, there was hardly a market that we could visit where we were not accosted by beggars. Some of those who begged from us were mothers with small children, small children on their own and people who were land mine accident survivors. I tried many types of responses from buying them food, to carrying around small packets of food to give to those who asked me for help. I also made it a point to talk with them. Besides giving me an opportunity to practice my *Khmer* (Cambodian) language, it lead to some very interesting conversations. It was easy earlier to just give off some *Khmer* money (local currency in Cambodia) and walk past, but now a relationship was beginning to develop. I encouraged as many of them as possible to try and do something to earn their living rather than begging. I learned their names, and about their lives, and continued to pray for them whenever I could. Later after I had moved to China to work and returned to Cambodia for holidays, I was pleasantly surprised to see that some of them had started little businesses selling books and postcards. I also learned that this was the result of an NGO that had especially chosen to work with them. Now whenever I go to the Russian Market (*Psar Totem Pong* in *Khmer*), I

end up buying the books and postcards that they sell, often things that have little use for me!

'Charity' or 'welfare' is a provision that has to be considered and provided for. There are those who end up below the 'Charity line' where all their 'social scaffoldings' get ruptured. Their need becomes so pronounced that they find themselves in utter despair, with no alternatives. We might not be able to change their situation by what little we do but it can do a lot to change our attitude towards them and towards restoring their lost dignity!

10

LET ME GIVE YOU MY BUSINESS CARD!

In all the experiences I have had, the most unusual has been that related to Mother Teresa, and it is interesting that as I write this, the meetings are taking place in Rome related to her Canonization! Different people have different perceptions about Mother Teresa, giving her all kinds of Titles. I think of her as a very special person, with a simple faith, and as a crusader for the cause of the poor. Just being in her presence was a unique experience. My colleagues often talk about the incredible capacity I have to talk when I have an audience! I often tell them, that it is nothing compared to the capacity Mother Teresa had to talk! We once visited her when she was in her early Eighties, and spent some time with her. She spoke non-stop for most of the time we were there with her, and even I just got to say something (the story of Ramesh which appears elsewhere in this book) only at the end! But, again, I am running ahead in my story. Let me start at the beginning...

Sara Anderson a World Vision journalist was down from Washington DC to cover a story at one of our Area Development Programs (ADP) in Maharashtra. The Navapur ADP had done excellently and had just transitioned from a Child Survival project

funded by USAID into an ADP. We were at Navapur along with a team lead by a Professor from the Loma Linda University in USA to carry out a final evaluation of the project. We had team members representing Johns Hopkins University, World Vision-USA, the Asia Pacific Regional office and World Vision India. The results of the work were excellent and we had expected it to be a special event for celebration along with the project Manager Mr DG Jebaraj and his team. The evaluation promised to be all that we expected it to be, highlighting the achievements over many years of achieving incredible levels of vaccination cover, reducing malnutrition and nutrition related disorders, and achieving unbelievable levels in reducing Maternal and Child mortality.

I remember Sara telling me afterwards that the experience was far beyond what she had dreamed it would be. After celebrating with the team, we were preparing to return to Mumbai from where the team was to disperse in different directions, when I got a telephone call from my colleague Mr. Jonathan Agrawal. “Ravi, I have a request”, he said, “Day-after-tomorrow we have the inauguration of the 24 hour famine Programme and Mother Teresa is the Chief Guest. I cannot attend, as I have an exam for my executive MBA course on the same day. Can you help me out by being there to represent WV India?” My response of assent must have been very enthusiastic, because the rest of the team members wanted to know as I put the phone down what I was so obviously excited about. When I told them the unexpected assignment I had just got, the rest were as excited as I was. The one who was most excited of course was Sara. She asked me if she could come along as she had 2 days of lay over in Mumbai before she was to catch her flight home. Sara was making this trip at her own cost, and I was surprised at her enthusiasm because she had just come back from a shooting assignment at an interview with other celebrities including the President of the United States. “I am overwhelmed”, she told me, “Because she is a super celebrity!”

On getting to Mumbai, we quickly made the ticket bookings and were on a flight to Calcutta. I quickly worked on a speech and a press release for the media. I was as excited as Sara. Arthur Charles, the Area Coordinator for area was to meet us at the airport and give us all the details of the Programme. I soon drifted off into sleep, and before long we were in Calcutta.

It was great meeting Arthur again, because we had worked together when I was supervising World Vision projects in that area a few years earlier. We were on the way to the hotel in a van when Arthur broke the news. The Missionaries of Charity administrator had rung him up to ask for a cancellation of Mother's appointment because they had a major fund raising event at the same time which Mother had forgotten about when confirming her program with World Vision. My heart sank, as I looked at Sara excitedly taking photographs through the window as we stopped at every traffic light. I was grateful that we were talking in Hindi so she couldn't understand what Arthur was telling me. The news would have been terrible for her to hear, considering that she was spending her personal money to make the trip! I asked Arthur if he could make arrangements for us to visit Mother in the morning for a few moments, and then with a glint in his eyes, Arthur told me that the sister at the office had rung up to say that Mother was very apologetic about the change she made and asked us to come and meet her so that she could give us a message to share with the participants at the 24 Hour Famine Programme! My spirits were soon soaring again.

When we (Sara, Bimal Gomes from the Calcutta office and I) arrived the next morning at the Missionaries of Charity Calcutta office, I was fascinated by the little name board outside the door. It said simply 'Mother Teresa' and the small window below was slid to show "in". Sara ended up taking 2 photographs of it when I pointed it out to her. I asked her to try and preserve as many photographs as possible for the meeting that was to take place in a few minutes and she showed me the half dozen rolls of film that she had kept especially

for the event. We were lead into a very ordinary looking room and told it was Mother Teresa's office. We waited for her arrival, the excitement mounting by the minute. I had met her before, but not like this. This was a novelty- an exclusive opportunity to meet her; and discuss with her, getting her full attention. When she finally arrived, I noticed amidst all the greeting and apologies and the 'thanks for meeting us', how frail and old she had become. We finally settled down and then the



three of us had the opportunity to get up one by one and photograph Mother and the others while the rest listened to her. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Mother did most of the talking. She talked about her relationship with World Vision, and about her plans to set up a home for the HIV/AIDS affected people, about her work in Calcutta and what she wanted us to share with the participants in the 24 hour famine Programme. We completely lost track of time as we listened to her, only pausing every now and then to get up and take photographs. Twice a sister came in to remind her about another group that was waiting for her, but she kept talking. When the sister came back for the third time, Mother asked us if we had time to join her at the next meeting, which was one with some donors who had come to meet her. Some children from the *Shishu Bhawan* (Children's home) were also giving a small performance for the visitors. The Programme was for an hour and as we had no other plans till later in the evening, we joined her. The whole experience was so unique, as mother insisted that we sit next to her on the Podium, and continued to explain to us about what the children were doing including translation the words they sang in Bengali! When the program finished, and the Donors group bid farewell, mother continued with a story she was telling us about a child at the *Shishu Bhawan*. After

she finished I told her the story of Ramesh, and expected somehow that she would remember putting the poor lady involved through all those trials. Instead she told us that there were many people like that with whom she had dealt similarly, so she could not remember exactly who it was.

We finally got ready to go and said Goodbye. As we were leaving, Mother asked us to wait. She then sent off one of the sisters to get something for us. "Let me give you my business card" she said. I was surprised and so were my colleagues. Almost in response to this she explained to us what had happened years ago. A Hindu businessman had accompanied his wife to visit her. It was the first time he had been to a Christian institution or any institution for that matter. It had been obvious that his wife had exerted a lot of pressure on him to leave his busy schedule to accompany her, and his impatience too was clearly visible. In fact as soon as they came he had insisted on obtaining her business card for future reference. In response to his question Mother had told him that as a nun, she didn't have a business card as she felt it was unnecessary. Despite the early aggression, the visit had been interesting as she had been able to share with them the work of the Missionaries of Charity. It ended with the man and his wife becoming very good friends of her organization and their continued support in years after that. But after the meeting on that particular day, as the couple was leaving the businessman once again brought up the issue of the business card, only to get the same answer once again from Mother Teresa. He then took out one of his own cards, and asked Mother to write something behind it. He returned a few hours later with 5000 business cards bearing those words on it. "In future" he told her, "please don't tell anyone that you don't have a business card". He had also left instructions with his Calcutta office to ensure that Mother was always kept supplied with a stock of cards. So she had in keeping with his request, ensured that whoever came to visit her was given one of the business cards.

The three of us also got her business cards that day. It was simple

as it was powerful. With a Bible verse on one side and on the other side the words 'Mother Teresa' and her address-'Calcutta, India'.

“So often when we meet people who are different from the ones that we are used to meeting, we allow their prejudices to bring out our own. The Lord Jesus has taught me to love them as He would have loved them, and accept that they are - different” Mother told us as we were leaving. She also told us that the man had since brought all his office staff and business associates to meet her, and that some of them were now regular volunteers in the various homes they ran around the city. What an important lesson in transformation for all of us to learn!

Don't let aggression and prejudice let you assume that someone is beyond the possibility of change, for unconditional love can cross and reach beyond any boundary to change and transform!

11

I HATE MY FATHER

“Whatever you say, please don’t say any thing about Fathers”, Felix the project Social worker warned me as I prepared to speak to the children at the *Ashroo* project in Ahmedabad.

I did some quick editing in my mind of what I had planned to say. The gist of what I had intended to say was about the goal of the project. It had intended to be *Ashroo* or a ‘place of safe refuge’ for street children, and give them parental care. I said all of this very carefully, avoiding mentioning the word ‘father’; determined in my mind to find out as soon as possible, the reason for which I had been cautioned.

It turned out that the reason for which Felix had advised me was because one of the street children who was actively involved in the group, a boy called ‘Salim’ had serious issues with the word “Father”. In fact this was the reason he had run away from home in the village. Continuing poverty and failing health had caused Salim’s father to become a short tempered and mean man. At the slightest provocation he would be angered and start shouting, often venting his anger on Salim by giving him a sound beating. Salim soon lost all respect for his father, often daring to challenge him openly. As time passed the father’s

health became worse and soon even his mother started raising her voice against the father's authoritarian behavior. When his father died a little later, Salim's mother took in another man and told him that he was his 'new father'. This man turned out to be even worse than his real father, and Salim had daily squabbles with him too. He spent most of his time outdoors, only to return at night and get a sound beating at the hands of his new 'Father'. This continued for a few months till one day in desperation he ran away from home. After boarding several trains with the intention of getting as far away as possible from home, Salim finally reached the city of Ahmedabad. He lived and survived on the street, stealing and begging for his food. He was a natural leader and soon was considered the unchallenged leader of a band of street children that stayed together for their survival on the street. Some of his group members had become involved with the *Ashroo* project of World Vision, and had finally convinced Salim to also get involved. He did this with caution, telling the social worker Felix that he was not making any serious commitments regarding his future. He wanted his freedom, and should be free to leave whenever he wanted. It was a time when, because of his experiences, he hated the very word 'Father', reacting strongly to it. I was told how on one occasion someone had mentioned to the group that 'God was like a Father'. Salim immediately stood up, shouting abuse. If God was a father, he shouted, he didn't want to have anything to do with him. It was at this stage I first met Salim. Having heard his story, I could well understand his feelings of hatred!

Like many others, the project welcomed Salim too into their work. They involved him in their programs, often making concessions for his erratic behavior. When a child lives on the harsh streets of a city, coping with the vagaries of life there, one can be sure that they have some serious issues of attitude toward the world that treated them badly. The staff was fully aware of this and treated each child with sensitivity. In Salim's case they took some additional precautions.

While I was Zonal Director in India many years ago, I was

supervising all World Vision India's projects in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. There were 23 Area Development Programmes that each operated at the District level covering populations of 35,000 to 50,000 people; and over 40 projects with partner agencies. Altogether there were over 500 staff working in all these projects. I had a zonal team of 22 people who worked with me to provide administrative and logistic support to the 23 field ADP Managers and their teams. The task often was overstretching and exhausting. Sometimes, for weeks together I would be traveling, meeting people, discussing, negotiating, and encouraging, correcting, resolving crisis. Work like this can come with several repeated discouragements. When things are going well at one place it always got countered by problems at the other end, sometimes calling for crisis resolution or disciplinary action. Problems were varied enough to test ones capacities to the limit. One place might have problems with under spending while another unrelated project from another donor maybe struggling to just survive with minimal activities. All this often called for travel for prolonged periods of time, and was always followed up by an avalanche of documents to deal with when I returned to headquarters! In those days , there were days when I stayed in office till the early hours of the morning after returning from a tour, just trying to clear my 'in tray'. It was tiring and exhausting, but I enjoyed it.

My purpose in mentioning this here is to point out that even with busy schedules; it is still possible for leaders to stay involved, when they can, with happenings at the grass roots level. I have always made it a point to pick projects that I stayed closely in touch with, and I encourage each reader to do the same. The *Ashroo* project was one of the projects I stayed in touch with, and made a point to visit. It never failed to inspire me and encourage me when I visited it. I tried during these visits to keep track of some of the more prominent street children that I had met with. Salim was one of them.

At regular intervals, every couple of months, when I visited the

project I noticed a visible change in Salim's behavior. He no longer had a hunted expression in his eyes and even his way of talking had become more restrained and polite. He still had to, of course, be the only one speaking during any discussions, and the rest of the children seemed to be willing to let him be their spokesperson. I tried to remember whenever I visited to not say any of the sensitive words- 'father' for Salim, and '*Lakdi*' for Prakash.

The project's work had expanded considerably. By word of mouth, more children came to know of the project and what it was doing, and got involved with it. In a year's time it had become a very prominent part of the work being done in the city of Ahmedabad. Percy Patrick the Program Manager and his team were now searching for a bigger location, especially to house the 'drop in' center. It turned out to be a more daunting task than had been earlier anticipated. A place was finally located, and I was requested to try to come for the inauguration of the new center which they had planned a small ceremony for. When I arrived, all the children were waiting outside the house, waiting for me to cut the symbolic ribbon (the center had already been in use for over a month!). We moved inside and sat down on a large cotton carpet while the staff and children sat around in a circle. I looked around for familiar faces and called out the names of those I knew, greeting them. Salim however seemed to be missing because this time it was Prakash who was doing all the talking. I was disappointed, and was tempted to break my rule of asking for him, when I noticed him sitting right in front of me! I had failed to recognize him because he looked so different, with his hair cut short, oiled and combed. His shirt for the first time had its entire buttons in place (earlier he was always getting into fights and getting the buttons ripped off during fights). The most surprising thing of course, was the way he was sitting silently without shouting or hitting anyone. If it hadn't been for his obviously healthy appearance, I would have thought he was sick!

Percy and Felix told me about the facilities and new developments, and then I got around to asking the children what they thought

about their shelter. There were excited responses from all over, as several of them talked simultaneously. Again I noticed Salim sitting quietly, and allowing others to talk first. This was admirable resolve on his part, to deliberately pull back. Finally when there was lull in the discussion I turned the attention to Salim and asked him what his dreams were for his future when he grows up.

“I will keep studying” he replied. Felix chipped in to say he was now attending classes regularly and would soon be integrated into a regular school.

“After you start going to school, then, what will you do?” I asked.

“I will complete the highest level of schooling and become a great man” he replied. (Most of the street children assume that finishing school helps them reach the pinnacle of education!)

“Then what will you do?” I persisted.

“After I become a big man, I will earn a lot of money and become very, very rich!” He replied.

“Then what will you do?” I continued.

“I will take all my money, and buy a house like this in the center of the city. Gather together all the stray children like me, and give them a place to live” he replied.

“Then what will you do? I asked once again

“I will look after them myself like they are my children, and I will be a ‘Father’ to them “, he replied, his face reflecting warmth and determination.

Transformation is sometimes a change of attitude and perspective that often results from healing of emotions and reconciliation of matters in one's mind. This happens not through argument or indoctrination, but as a result of persistent care and Love. The Lord can heal any wound, no matter how deep; and when He heals, there is no scar left behind!

12

TELL ME WHAT TO DO...

I went to Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia in 1997 to train all the World Vision Mongolia field staff in Participatory development Programming. The experience was awesome. Though I went there in what I was assured was 'mid-summer', the temperature dropped one day to - 5 degrees Celsius! That was not the only strange thing I was to discover about Mongolia, I discovered many things, including that we just couldn't find seeds anywhere to use in our participatory exercises! But then I am running ahead in my story. Let me get back to the beginning. I was invited by World Vision Mongolia to train their staff and also some of their other National Government partners and representatives from other International Non-Government Organizations (NGOs.)

As I flew into Ulaan Baatar from Beijing, I was conscious as the plane circled the Airport that this was rather dry looking scenery below me. The gently sloped mountains looked brown, with almost no green visible for miles around. There were patches of snow in some place and as we taxied down the runway I wondered if Mr. Otto Fracas the Country Director, who promised to come to meet me would be there. My earlier fears about whether he would be able

to recognize me had ceased when I left Beijing. I was the only Indian on the flight, and nobody else betrayed the slightest signs of being confused to be an Indian!

“Hi, you must be Ravi”, said a pleasant faced man with a beard, as I came through immigration. He brought along a warm fur overcoat for me as promised, and I was really appreciative of it when I stepped out of the Airport and the cold air hit me. We began our long drive to the city and my Hotel as Otto gave me a background of the Country, its people, and a quick run down on the participants. I checked into my hotel, and settled in. The rest of the day was uneventful except for eating Camel and Horse meat for dinner and drinking Camel’s milk with salt added to it! It turned out to be less unusual than I had imagined and except for me, nobody in the restaurant seemed to find it strange, so I just left it at that! I spent the late evening preparing for the workshop ahead. I had prepared a new set of transparencies using photographs that Otto had sent me from Mongolia so that the participants would at least find something familiar in all that I would be showing them.

Otto picked me up in the morning and we drove down to the City Center. I was told that we would be using a Government conference facility and that the first session would have some very senior government dignitaries attending and also that it would be covered by the National Television. Once the initial introductions of the Chief guest and the dignitaries and participants was over, I began with a quick introduction and overview about Participatory Learning and Action that Otto had requested me to give for the benefit of the V.I.P.s. I tried to read the expressions of the participants to see if I could read anything there, but there were no visible clues. By the time we were ready to break for Coffee, I was concerned and planned to check with Otto how we were doing. He seemed quite busy discussing animatedly with the guests, so I busied myself just walking around and shaking hands with people. Of all the countries I have visited in my life, Mongolia is the only one where I was unable

to pick up a single word. After the 3rd attempt, I even gave up trying to learn how to say 'hello'. As the coffee break ended, and participants started returning to their seats, I was looking forward to spending a few moments rearranging the seating arrangement to make it less formal. Otto rushed to me with a request. "Ravi, I know you planned to change things around and start more informally, but we may have to continue this way because Madame Hulan has requested to stay for the next session too." (Madame Hulan, whom I had been introduced to, was the Chief Guest for the inaugural session, and was the Chairperson of the Senate Social and Economic development committee for Mongolia). Before I started, Madame Hulan, who spoke excellent English asked me to 'proceed with teaching the participants as though she wasn't there'. I proceeded with the next session and the one after that to explain the philosophy of PLA and quoted examples of how it had been used in other countries to impact the lives of communities. As we broke for Lunch, I was surprised that Ms Hulan wanted to come back again in the afternoon for the rest of the day's sessions. I had on my part tried not to be distracted by her presence, concentrating on the needs of the other participants largely, and only briefly summarizing the observations at the end to show how the Macro perspective could also be used for planning from a National perspective. In the afternoon session I noticed her making notes, and also moving out on one or two occasions to talk on the phone. During Dinner I had an excited and anxious Otto checking out with me if it was alright for Ms. Hulan to join us during the field visit to the outskirts of Ulaan Baatar. He had received a request from Ms. Hulan herself and was concerned about how I would view it. I responded that it was perfectly alright for her to come along as long as she was willing to just join with one of the groups and take part in the practical exercises that they were doing.

The next day we were busy with the exercises. I had given assignments for each group to practice three exercises each profiling the area so that we could later pool this information together and get



a Macro perspective of the needs and potential for development programs there. I didn't see Ms. Hulan as I was only able to follow up with 3 of the 4 groups. Perhaps she was with the 4th group or had dropped her plans to come? Soon we were so immersed in the exercises that we were observing, and the quality of the information that was emerging that I forgot completely about her plans to join us. Otto and I had broken off after the 3rd group to go to a remote location and visit a person living in a *Tugruk* (tent house). In keeping with the approach to be open ended in our questioning , I had kept asking him 'what else?', and the man , all excited with our interest in his world kept showing us details about his home. He made some soup for us, and kept describing details on how his house was constructed of Camel hide, its heating system, and its capacity to provide him shelter even in mid winter when temperatures are likely to go as low as -50 degrees Celsius. We listened to him with great interest. Some of the information was already known to Otto, but it was absolutely fascinating for me. We continued to listen, and kept asking 'what else?' By now the man had exhausted all he could tell us, but at the last 'what else?' he seemed to hesitate, as though debating in his mind whether he should share something with us. This was obviously a secret. Finally he decided that it was Okay to share it with us, and he reached inside the cupboard under his bed and pulled out a bag. He continued to talk with Otto and the two of them were animatedly in conversation. I was lost to what was happening as I couldn't understand a word they were saying except that they seemed to be talking about a round rock that he was describing. "Hang on, let me get some photographs of this and then I'll translate for you" replied

Otto, when I asked him what all the fuss was about. I waited patiently for the information which completely floored me when I heard it. Otto told me the man had just returned from working in the Gobi desert area with a team of people who were doing some research there. He was one of the laborers asked to dig up and excavate the site of what was believed to be a large Dinosaur hatchery. He had no idea of what the foreigners were looking for, except that they seemed to get very excited when they came across a circular rock like the one that he had shown us. He had seen some similar ones close to the place where they had dug the sand to put up the camp, so the man had decided to also slip one into his belongings quietly and take it with him when he returned home. This is what he had shown us. Otto held up the circular stone. "Ravi", he said, "you are looking at a fossilized Dinosaur egg!" I remained skeptic till he showed me one later at the Russian museum. Only that one was broken, and smaller, but kept in a glass case with heavy security! We returned all excited to the rest of the group that had assembled at the town hall. The groups were excited about how the exercises worked and in animated discussion.

We asked the community members to settle in and one by one each of the groups started making their presentations. The community listened with rapt attention cheering at various places and discussing animatedly at the end of each presentation. I stood by at the rear end of the hall, observing the groups and watching the community. I had made arrangements with Otto to summarize for me in the evening the findings of each group. I was busy taking photographs, as there was little else I could do. I noticed Ms Hulan making her way through the crowd towards me a determined look on her face. She drew me aside and said, "OK, I am convinced. I have seen how this works. Please tell me now what to do and I will make it National Policy!" Wow, that is the type of commitment one asks of leadership only in dreams! I told her to make it possible for a system to be in place that will ensure that the local community is always consulted

before plans are made for their development and that they are actively involved in the planning and implementation of those programs.

I was to learn later that Madame Hulan stayed closely involved with the program and the work of WV Mongolia, sharing her observations with the other Senate members. Also during that field visit a local Buddhist nun who was serving the community got interested as she was watching the exercises in the community and sought permission from Otto to attend the rest of the sessions. I learnt the next day, when I saw her in class that she had spent most of the night before reading up the notes that she had borrowed from the other participants so that she was up-to-date on what had happened in earlier sessions.

Transformational changes take place in those in whom we least expect it, when we least expect it. Sometimes it is like a wildfire that catches and spreads, and generates human and other resources to resource the process that we are least aware of. In keeping with this spirit of surprising developments, I learned later from Otto that the UNDP people in

Mongolia had watched the program on Television and felt sorry they couldn't attend, however they were interested in any ensuing documentation from the workshop which could be shared with them. Otto had then shared with them the 'Community Resource Development Plan' generated in the Community, and they in turn had responded saying they were willing to fund the program if a budget of costs involved could be worked out. This was promptly done by Otto and his team and they received funding for the project. God has big plans for His work, and sometimes our inability to 'see this fully' is the biggest impediment to the fulfillment of the plans.

13

SHARE YOUR CARE

“Is everything O.K.?” asked my secretary Anjani.

I looked up from the report I was reading, embarrassed that I hadn’t noticed her standing at the door of my office with a curious and concerned look on her face. I quickly wiped away the tears.

“Yes, everything is fine”, I replied, “It was this report from Percy’s project that I was reading. It is terrific, what they are doing there in Ahmedabad”.

I was reading the monthly report from one of the Program Managers who supervised an urban project which also had a Street children support component. I always made it a point to read every monthly report though it took a lot of time doing this, and often had me staying behind in the office for long hours just to do it (there were 23 such reports every month!). The reports detailed all the activities that had taken place during the month, especially highlighting issues the managers felt were of concern or for celebration. This particular report from Percy Patrick talked about some new developments that were taking place with the street children support program in Ahmedabad. He was in the process of generating more support from the local Churches for a sympathetic response to

the needs of street children. Percy had often shared with me how frustrating the whole effort had often been, even when he was trying to find a place to be used as a 'drop in' center for the street children who were regularly involved with the project. Percy never gave up trying, and continued his relentless efforts week after week speaking at Churches around the city of Ahmedabad. Finally his efforts seemed to have paid off, and several Churches had responded by nominating to Percy people who were willing to be volunteers in his new Programme, called the "share your care" Programme. This special event was designed, Percy mentioned in his report, to let some of the regular children at the project experience for a day what a 'family' was like. The 16 children selected for this exercise were to be taken to a family each and spend the whole day with them. They were to observe and see what a family was like and then come back and share with their peers about their experiences. They were also to share about their world with the families they spent time with, answering their questions about why they were on the street, and how they lived and survived there. Percy had spent many days personally talking to the street children selected explaining how important this exercise was and how none of them should spoil it by stealing from the homes they were to visit or by behaving badly there. He made every child promise him personally regarding this, but despite their 'apparent honest assurance' Percy remained worried. He sent out prayer requests to all his friends to pray for everything to go well. In fact, as the time drew near for the appointed Saturday, he was so jittery that he was hoping somehow that the weather would change or that a curfew or something would be declared in the city so that they would have to call off the program!

But this hope was in vain, for as the time drew near, the weather was perfect, and the evening before, each family participating in his 'Share your care' Programme had rung him up and confirmed that they were all excited about the day ahead. On Saturday morning, the Mini-van that Percy had hired also arrived early and when he

went along to the appointed place to meet the street children. They were hardly recognizable, hair oiled and well combed, looking prim and proper standing in an orderly fashion, with obvious excitement. One more last lecture from Percy about behaving well and they were soon on their way. The children were all dropped off one by one with the appointed families and Percy and his assistant finally returned to the office to wait till 5 PM in the evening, when they were due to start picking up the children from each home.

The wait turned out to be more difficult than they had imagined, with all sorts of horrible possibilities crossing their minds about what could go wrong. They stayed close to the phone, waiting any moment to get a message of complaint, but the hours just dragged by slowly till it was time for them to start on their 'pick up' rounds. When they reached the first home, Percy was extremely nervous as he walked down the drive way. The silence outside made him more apprehensive than ever. Hesitatingly he knocked on the door. Then after not hearing anything, rang the doorbell. The house owner came to the door and opened it. Percy was ready to hear a whole lot of complaints; instead he was invited in to meet everyone. There, inside, sitting on the carpet in the middle of the group was the street child, talking away about something, while his audience sat around held in rapt attention to every word he was saying! Finally, when Percy got a chance to say something about it being time for him to take back the child there were protests all around.

"Please go to the other families first" they said, "and then come to our home last. We have a lot of things to catch up with as we listen to *Dinesh* tell us about his experiences!" It had been the same way at every home that Percy went to after that. Each family had cancelled every appointment they had and spent the whole day at home. They cooked the best food they could, dressed as simply as they could to make the street child feel comfortable, and when they finally gave the children back to Percy, sent them off with a parcel of clothes, books, toys and a whole lot of goodies to eat. Some families

had even invited their other relatives to join them for the 'event'! It wasn't till late in the night that they finally picked up each of the children and dropped them off at



the pick up point. Percy's report concluded with the changes he saw in the attitudes of Churches to the issue of caring for street children. Volunteers later shared their experiences of 'sharing their care' with others. It wasn't so hard to find volunteers after that for new Programmes or those willing to support the street children Programme. The project staff learned that there were many in the city that also cared.

Percy, on his part, learned that he had a God who was able to do far exceedingly above all he could dream or ask, and that he could transform the hearts and minds of people when it was least expected.... and that that transformation has a ripple effect, spreading out to influence far more people than were first involved! It is important to give people the opportunity to be involved in transforming lives. More often than not, this gives them also the opportunity for their lives to be transformed.

14

LAKDI

As we entered the *Ashroo* shelter for street children, there were two children running from one that was limping and chasing them with a stick. On seeing us enter, they all stopped and sat down quietly. The child with the stick looked pretty upset, while the other two were still giggling from some prank they had obviously played on him. As we sat down the project staff told me the real name of the lame boy was '*Prakash*'. He was a 'run away child' living on the streets for over a year when the staff met him and involved him with the programs of the project. He was now staying at the shelter, and despite his young age had a very nasty temper. I told the staff that I was not surprised that he was that way because I noticed the other children had been teasing him and calling him '*Lakdi*' which means 'stick'. Probably a dig at the fact, that he used the 'stick' to support himself as he moved about. Despite the protection and care in the street children's shelter, it is often hard to instill the same feelings in the children towards their peers. They have lived so long on the harsh streets that old habits die hard.

Prakash, I learned later had had a very sad story. He had got polio as a child and this left him crippled. He and his younger brother

lived with their widowed mother who was herself very sick. After her husband's death following prolonged illness, Prakash's mother had to live at the mercy of her older brother staying in an old and dilapidated outhouse in the village. She had used all her resources to take care of her husband during his illness, and was now left with almost nothing. During one of the heavy storms in the area the wall of the old dilapidated house fell on her crushing her to death, leaving the two children orphaned. They were taken into the house of their uncle and continuously had to hear the bickering of their aunty who often shouted at them and beat them. Every time Prakash came in her way she shouted him and called him '*langda*' which means 'lame person'. Neither of the boys was allowed to continue school, and after 6 months, unable to bear the persecution any longer, the 8 year old Prakash ran away from home. He wandered from place to place till finally he reached Ahmedabad city and lived and survived on the street. It was here that the staff of the project had found him. Now, as the owner of little other than a thick cane, (which had earned him the name of 'Lakdi' from his peers in the project) he had conceded to be involved with the project, but had a tendency to isolate himself from the other children.

I guess it was his smartness in learning and his ability to respond to the teaching that the children received in the literacy classes that endeared him to the staff. All of them made special efforts to be patient with him and tolerated a lot of rudeness and aggression from him. On their part they did their best not to refer to him as '*Lakdi*'. Ever since I had heard Prakash's story I felt very concerned about him. What a lot of suffering for a little child to go through. I always made it a point to find out how he was doing every time I visited the project; along with some of the other children there I had come to know.

A couple of months after this visit I had a phone call from Percy Patrick who was the Program Manger for the World Vision projects in Ahmedabad, asking if there was any funding available for a special operation for Prakash's leg. I told him to fax me an estimate of the cost

and soon had funding available under a special project called “Operation Handicap”. This project had a provision for covering the costs of operations for children who were handicapped. I faxed back the approval to Percy and asked him to keep me posted on progress. A week later, I had another call from Percy, and thought he was calling to let me know that the operation had taken place. However, as soon as I heard his voice on the phone, I knew something was terribly wrong. I was informed that the operation could not take place as Prakash had run away. They had searched all over the place for him, but there was no sign of him. The next morning during office devotions, I shared this news with my colleagues in the Zonal office. I had always made it a point to share with my team all that had happened during the field visits that I went on, so they all knew about Prakash and also about the special provision that we now had for his leg to be operated. They now were as sad as Percy and I were with the news about Prakash running away. Percy told me that Prakash had been excited at first about the operation, but a day before he was scheduled to go to the hospital, he ran away. I told him we would keep the approval for the operation on hold, and see how things went. If Prakash was afraid of getting operated, we could even cancel it. The important thing was to get him back to the shelter and off the street.

After almost a month, Percy rang up again and told me that Prakash had been located, and that he had agreed to return to the *Ashroo* shelter. Percy told me that Prakash had only returned after his personal assurance that he will not have to have any operation. Accordingly we also agreed and had the fund returned to the central pool for use of any other child that needed emergency care. In the months that followed, I learned that things had returned to the way they were before Prakash had left. The operation was not mentioned again, and Prakash had returned to his old ways of aggression as his peers once again started referring to him, this time, as *‘Loata Lakdi’* (the returned stick!). We left matters at that, glad that Prakash was back, and sad that he could not have the operation. Weeks passed



by, and we had almost forgotten about Prakash. Percy rang up again, and asked if we could once again make the fund available for the operation! Apparently, this time Prakash himself had approached him, and asked if he could have the operation. I felt very sad when Percy quoted him word for word, “I have nobody

to grieve for me. If I die during the operation - I die! But, if I live, at least no one will ever again call me ‘Lakdi’”

With some difficulty, we mobilized the fund again. The operation was major, but there was no risk of death which Prakash had presumed. How do you explain that to someone who has experienced nothing but unkindness all their lives? The operation took place this time, and I was relieved to know that everything went well. Over the next few months I was busy with visits to other areas and projects and planning for a major evaluation. It was several months before I had a chance to go again to Gujarat. Finally, when I did go there, it was while on my way to another project for which I had to pass through Ahmedabad. Percy met me at the airport and had arranged for a quick visit to the project before going to the hotel to check in for the night. We had to drive a great distance the next morning, so the visit was to be a brief one.

The children in the shelter were watching a movie when I arrived, and we spent some quick moments of greeting each other. I loved all the children in the home, but was impatient to see Prakash. I tried my best not to ask for him, least any of the other children felt I was playing favorites. Then to my surprise, I saw him. The staff had planned a dramatic entry. Prakash came walking without the support of a stick, and in his hand was a bouquet of flowers! The children were all clapping as they let him through. He had on a set of calipers,

and was able to walk almost without a limp. Once in a while one gets to see these big changes, and it was an emotional moment for me. Making this diversion to see the children was worth it!

Later that night over dinner, Percy related to me the details of what had happened. After Prakash had returned and agreed to the operation, the social worker had taken him several times to the hospital as well as the orthopedic rehabilitation center to see the calipers that he would have to wear after the operation to straighten his leg. They had had the measurements taken and for some reason the delivery of calipers was delayed. Prakash had turned his anger and frustration against Felix the project senior social worker. "No one cares, no one does anything for anyone else" he had said bitterly. Felix on his part was determined to show Prakash that his accusation was not true, and had waited at the shop later that evening to make sure that the work on the calipers was completed, and made sure it was delivered in Prakash's hospital room before he went in for the operation. When he was wheeled off for the operation, in a rare gesture of warmth, Prakash had requested Felix to walk by his side till he was taken into the Operation theatre; waving him goodbye as though he was leaving for ever.

The operation itself took over 4 hours as the surgeons cut, separated, repaired and reshaped Prakash's leg. In his attempt to be independent, Prakash had become overly dependent on the stick that he used to support himself while walking. The corrective surgery was able to restore his leg considerably. He would now definitely be able to walk with the help of calipers and definitely without a stick!

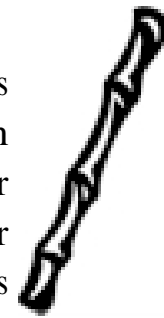
When he recovered from the general anesthesia that he had been put under for the operation, the first thing he noticed was the calipers that the senior social worker of the project Felix had brought for him. The temptation to try it out was too strong. He crept out of bed and hopped on one foot to the corner of the room. The desire to test it out was much stronger than the pain he felt in his leg. With a Herculean effort he lifted his leg into the caliper, while leaning against

the wall, and strapped it on. Then with the greatest of caution he moved away from the wall and tried to walk. The first step sent excruciating pain through his leg, but it didn't deter him. This is what he had risked his life for. He was going to walk the rest of way back to the bed even if it killed him! Half way to the bed he slipped and fell. The pain in his leg had now increased considerably, and he could barely get up. He dragged himself up to the bed, undid the straps and pushed the calipers under the bed, and quickly crawled back into the bed as he heard someone coming down the corridor. It was the night nurse, and as she came in and examined Prakash's bandage, she was concerned that there was some bleeding. She left the room and returned shortly with a doctor. The two of them were examining him when Prakash pretended to awaken. The doctor was surprised that one of the stitches seemed to have opened. Together they changed the dressing, and gave him an injection. As they were leaving, Prakash called out to the doctor.

"I have a request" he said as politely as he could, "can you take that stick in the corner and throw it away? I am never going to need it again!"

I almost choked on my food as Percy came to this part of his story. What a strong will and determination this little child had. What a strong desire he had for change in his situation. When he returned to the shelter a week later, I was told, the children gave him what was like a hero's welcome. Felix had sought and obtained a promise from all of them that they would never again call him 'Lakdi'. True to their promise, they never called him by that name again! Everyone now referred to him as Prakash, which means 'light'. On his part, Prakash lived up to his name, being a real light in that group, leading and encouraging other children there to take a keen interest in studying and developing their skills and capacities.

As a development organization we had played a small part in that process of transformation, by being available and flexible and releasing



the deep desire of that heart to realize its dream. There is often no way by which damages of the past can entirely be corrected. Past pain sometimes lays unrecognizably buried deep in the Psyche, taking years to be mended or forgotten. The process of transformation is labor intensive and time consuming. But the result of our involvement with Prakash also brought changes in all of us, and the hundreds of people with whom I shared Prakash's story. I once heard the founder of 'Haggai Institute for advanced Leadership training', Dr. John E. Haggai say of leaders, "He who is too big to serve the individual is too small to serve the masses".

I believe that is true with all my heart!

15

YOU AND I SIT ON THE SAME MAT...

“..... this is a quick overview of all that we have accomplished in the course of the project’s life time!” concluded the Project Manager with a dramatic flourish. I could see that he was determined to impress me. In September of 1992 I had just joined World Vision as an Associate Director, and I was on my first orientation visit to see a field project. I also came to know that the project I was visiting was close to the end of its life time, and as a member of the leadership team I would sooner or later be involved in the planning process related to the future of these projects. I had been doing a lot of reading about the projects and was keen to see how things were in the villages.

After the ‘overview’ in the office I was taken on a round of the villages. The Project Manager was understandably nervous. They had obviously heard about the new “AD” (as we were referred to in those days) who had come into World Vision from the ‘secular world’. This, coupled with the fact that I had worked in Bihar, was from the South but more familiar with the North, and wore a French beard must have been quite intimidating. I tried to make him feel as

comfortable as possible by asking him to tell me about his work, but he seemed to see it as if he was 'on test' for his performance.

I was taken from village to village and shown different infrastructure that had been created with the help of World Vision. There were many small schools, and Community halls, and dispensaries all over the area. Several damaged houses had been reconstructed; hundreds of villagers had been assisted in small ventures of micro enterprise development. As I looked around, I was impressed. The project manager and his team had obviously worked very hard to do all of this work. They had also made sure they had worked with some of the most marginalized people in the area, sometime traveling great distances to reach them. For us now, traveling in an air conditioned car, in the blazing sun , it was still quite exhausting; so I told him how much I appreciated their effort having done all that work traveling on motorcycles and Mopeds . He was a little relieved when I said this, but he kept referring to his list of sites to be visited, which he was determined to complete before we took a break for eating lunch. By lunch time, we still had one more village to visit. This turned out to be a village quite close to the restaurant where we were going to have lunch. I made a suggestion. Could we go there after Lunch, so that we could spend a little more time at the village? Till now I had hardly had any time to discuss things with the villagers as we were just moving from place to place on a very tight schedule.

When he saw that I was determined to spend time with the villagers, he agreed. I had also wanted it because I wanted to be sure the villagers had finished eating their food and would therefore not be in a hurry to finish the meeting. I had seen some impressive work around, but I wanted to have some close interaction with the villagers too. While we placed our orders for lunch at the hotel, the Project Manager took a quick ride to the village and made necessary arrangements for the meeting. He returned to say everything was fixed. Instead of going immediately after lunch, we were to return after 3 p.m. We would first again visit some infrastructure projects

in the village and then have a meeting in the village. I was pleased, and though we had a good lunch and some pleasant conversation after that I could see that the Project Manager was a little distracted.

After lunch we drove around a little. We had an hour at our disposal before we returned to the village, and it was good to see the pleasant surroundings of Rural Tamil Nadu with its coconut trees and gentle hills in the background. The sky was blue with almost no clouds visible anywhere. I was struck by the contrast between the sky here and in Chennai City (formerly known as Madras). The pollution levels had risen so high that there was always a gray haze everywhere. I talked about other things with the Project Manager, like our families and children. The break was good for him and by the time we were on our way to the village again he was actually smiling!

When we reached the village however, the tension seemed to return. Each time we visited a school building or passed by a lake or a well, he pointed it out as something that his project had done. I also noticed that he kept checking back with his staff to make sure that they had everything in place for the meeting later on. The village visit was soon over and we arrived at the venue for the meeting. It was to be under the shade of some trees in the courtyard of the school building. Of course I was told that the school building was made by the project! As we got down from the car, several elderly people moved towards us and greeted us. I was told that they were members of the Village development Committee (VDC). They were dressed typically in white cotton clothes and greeted me with the customary folding of hands and a greeting of '*Vannakam*'. At last I was happy to be able to interact with the community and accepted the garland of yellow flowers they gave me. We moved toward the rest of the group. There were plenty of villagers; the men all dressed in white, the women in their brightly colored saris. There were also many school children in their school uniforms and school bags. I didn't have to ask to be told that this was also something that the project had done!

As we prepared to get started, I was appalled to see the arrangements for the meeting. There were several mats spread out on which the villagers sat, and at a little distance from it, was a table and two chairs. It became obvious to me that I was to sit on one of these, while the project manager was to sit on the other. As we took our places, every one settled in with serious looking faces, prepared to hear a speech from each of us. As soon as I was introduced and asked to 'say a few words', I got up and moved to the mats, asking them if I could join them. The change was electrifying. Everyone was moving about, but they were smiling. Soon everyone was seated on the mat. The table and chairs stood unused in a corner. Everyone, it seemed, was talking at the same time. I was now in my element, the Project Manager of course was very unhappy. I raised my hands to get people to be quiet, and a hush fell over the crowd. I saw excited faces looking at me to hear what I had to say. I spoke in English with the Project Manager translating for me. I told them I had spent the entire morning visiting villages like theirs and had seen what the World Vision Project had accomplished during the many years it had been in operation. It was interesting to see how my sentence was translated. "The AD wants you to tell him all that World Vision has been doing in your village like...." and he listed some of the things. The VDC chief took it from there, enumerating the things that had been told to him. I got a back translation into English with a few more details added on. This was now getting to be a little too much. To make things worse, Project Manager was even subtly trying to point things out to the VDC chief to describe. It was time to bring a change. I stopped the VDC chief in mid sentence and spoke to him directly in Tamil. I told him I had already read the report about the village. That they were a community of snake charmers, who had been relocated to this village. That I knew all about every bit of infrastructure that World Vision had set up in the village. That I was already impressed with the Project Manager and his team and

so I didn't need to hear any more praises about them. That what I really wanted to know was, "in all the years that World Vision had worked in his village, what was the greatest change?"

I guess that sent some shock waves around. That I had spoken in Tamil for the first time during the trip. That I had interjected with a strange request such as I had just made. That I had spoken quite sternly. The Project Manager's shoulders slumped. It had been a terrible day for him. Things had gone completely out of hand here!

The VDC chief on the other hand was not deterred. He looked me straight in the eyes.

"Do you want to really know, what is the greatest change that has taken place in my village since World Vision came here to work?" There was strange gleam in his dark eyes as he waited for my response.

"Yes I do" I replied, "That's why I asked you".

There was an atmosphere of excitement and tension in the air, as we all waited for his response.

"The greatest change in my village" he said "is that you and I and all of us here, sit on the same mat and talk as equals!"

I felt my eyes moisten. I saw his face soften as he saw my reaction. I reached out and held his hand. He covered my hand with his other hand. There was no need to say anything. Even if I had wanted to, I am sure I would not have been able to. The rest of what happened that day is a blur in my memory. I do remember we went around visiting many homes, and didn't leave for the city till quite late in the evening. Those words are still etched in my mind never to be forgotten. What a testimony of transformation to hear first hand from those who have experienced it!

Transformation enables, it empowers, it does not create dependence, but liberates. And above all else, Transformation results in a sense of increased worth and value- that comes from restored dignity!

16

NIKHIL

When Vimla returned from the visit of the project she was quite exhausted. I also noticed an expression of deep sadness on her face. I knew she would talk about it later, and was working out in her mind a way to resolve all that she had seen.

My wife Vimla was visiting Pune from Chennai, to spend time with me and I had planned to have her visit several projects so that she could get an idea about the type of work we were doing so that she could pray for us more meaningfully. I guess the project staff had in their enthusiasm taken her around a great deal. When *Sunita Waghmare*, the Program officer who had accompanied her came to my office she gave me a quick update on the visit. They had been to the Pune Urban ADP followed by a visit to our special project for the children of the Commercial Sex Worker's (CSW's) children. Both these project sites were considerably difficult areas and were places with some very poor people who lived in miserable conditions. Sunita told me that Vimla had taken a lot of interest in the visit and spent time discussing with the community members, especially the women's group. It was when they went to visit the red light area where the

children of CSWs were that she got the shock of her life. She had been very quiet and pensive on the way back to the Zonal office.

Later that evening, as we were eating dinner Vimla talked about the visit and how she had been shocked by the visit to the project dealing with the children of Commercial Sex Workers. As was typical of first time visitors she wondered why the government didn't clamp down hard on 'this terrible debasing practice' and rescue all the women who lived in such horrible conditions. However, that was not the only reason that she was sad. During the visit to the Pune Urban ADP, she had spent time talking to the women's group and learned how they had their own saving group and how it allowed members to access capital for their economic activities. Vimla is a firm believer in the fact that the only way women can be emancipated is through 'economic independence', so I expected her to talk about that next, and was still confused about why she was so sad. If anything, she should have been happy and impressed. I waited for her to tell me.

They had been discussing the various activities of the women's group when one of the women had come to Vimla and shared with her about her son whose name was *Nikhil*. The little boy was 7 years old and had continuously had some problem or the other from the time he was born. She told Vimla how her husband and she had waited desperately to have a child and when was born they had rejoiced greatly that the child was a boy (something that is very important in some communities). But their joy had been short lived, because they soon discovered some physical abnormalities in his excretory system that required surgical treatment. Nikhil's father was an ordinary security guard in an apartment complex and till Nikhil was born his mother worked as a part time maid in a doctor's house. It was this doctor that had out of the kindness of his heart performed the first corrective surgery that Nikhil had required. After Nikhil's birth, his mother had to take constant care of him, and so was unable to continue her work as a house maid. They had used up all their savings and even taken loans in the first few years of Nikhil's life, but

felt it was worth it because they now had a son. That joy too was cut short when they discovered that Nikhil became breathless as soon as he started playing. They had him checked up and found that he had a defect in his heart that required surgical intervention. The doctor had also said this operation was to be completed before he reached the age of 8, and Nikhil's mother had done her best to try and save for the operation. With all her efforts, she was nowhere near reaching even a fraction of the amount that was required for the operation. Nikhil's mother was now appealing to Vimla as the Zonal Director's wife to intervene. She didn't want the money. All she wanted was more time to raise the money, and the operation to be carried out before he reached the age of 8.

"Please try and do something for this little child and save his life", Vimla said to me as she completed relating her experience, and reached across the table and held my hand. Her big eyes were looking at me straight in the eye. For a moment she was transposed like a mother appealing for her child's life.

I have often thought about that day. I have wondered why Nikhil's mother had never approached me directly when I went to visit the project. Perhaps she didn't ask because I was a man, or perhaps because I was inaccessible as the Zonal Director? Perhaps it was difficult for her to ask because there were others with me from the project who had already told her that her child's needs were too much for the project to make available for one single child while there were thousands of children in the project area with needs? Whatever the reason, one thing was certain, a mother had reached out to another mother (Vimla had told me that Nikhil's mother had asked her if she had children) and appealed to her to help save her child. I was determined to see what could be done. I took the slip of paper that Vimla gave me with the child's name and sponsorship number and started following up on it the next day.

I obtained details of Nikhil's case from the project. A social worker went over to his house, and got all the medical documents

photocopied. Despite the fact the Nikhil's mother could barely write her own name, she had kept every document and prescription safely in a plastic bag from the time of his birth. I called up friends in the city and we arranged for the most skilled heart surgeon in the city to examine Nikhil. Armed with the report of the Doctor we now had an estimate of the cost involved. The cost was prohibitive even for us as an organization - close to 85,000 Rupees! I called up Raymond Thomas my colleague in the National office who was the Director for National Resource development. He reminded me that funds were tight and that he had already asked me to reduce budgets in several of the local funded projects. I called others. Everywhere the answer was the same- 'fund positing is tight'. The word had now gone out, and every one was trying to get details. I heard from someone that the Wochkardt group had a hospital in Bangalore that carried out operations. I called them, but they already had commitments for a whole year. Could I try again after a year? They asked. I sent out a message to all colleagues in my zone with details of Nikhil's case and asked them to make enquiries. There were no favorable responses from anywhere. It looked like we would have to apologize to Nikhil's mother and say it was impossible to save her son.

And then it struck me. Why don't we raise the money ourselves? Surely 85,000 Rupees is not too much? If we found 85 people who were willing to give a 1000 Rupees each, we would have our money....or perhaps even 850 people who would give a 100 Rupees each!

That seemed possible, and I was excited. In a weeks time we had a Zonal Operations meeting coming up. I could share it with all the ADP Managers then. It would also be a good experience for us in fund raising as a team.

At the end of the Operations meeting I shared the details of the plan. We had prepared small donation tickets for raising the money for Nikhil's operation and I asked the 23 ADP Managers in my zone to let me know how many they were interested to have. I was

encouraged to see that over half the tickets were taken. Many of the Managers assured me that they would have liked to take more tickets but they were not sure how many would actually be required. In the succeeding week we had calls from several of them, telling us that the tickets they had taken had already been used up and that they wanted more. When they shared Nikhil's story they were surprised at how willing people were willing to give. In a short time we had run out of tickets! I was disappointed that there were one or two in my zone who had taken tickets who came back after 10 days and said they didn't have time to talk to anyone about it. Fortunately there were enough people to take those tickets, so it really didn't matter that they didn't care to have a role in Nikhil's life.

In the weeks following the announcement of our plans to raise support for Nikhil's operation, we heard several encouraging stories. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to be able to make a contribution to do something for Nikhil!

We had also asked the hospital for a list of materials required for the operation and asked our project in Mumbai to contact the main company to see if they could sell it to us at cost price. One of the items in the list was quite expensive, almost 10,000 Rupees and I reckoned it would be a considerable reduction in costs if we didn't have pay the retail rates for it. I was surprised one morning to get a call from the Director of one of the companies. "Where do you want the special canula delivered?" he asked. I was caught off guard, wondering if we had to also end up paying for the transportation of the equipment! It turned out, when they found out about Nikhil, that they were giving it to us as a donation! He also wanted us to fax him details of the other items required for the operation to see if they or their associates could help out with more materials! The stories of individuals and organizations who gave, and supported, is almost endless; each story more exciting than the other. The actual costs were now going to be far less than the earlier estimate, and we soon had enough commitments in funding for the operation!

You can only imagine how Nikhil's mother responded when a project staff went over and told her, everything was in place for his operation. She clung to Nikhil and just cried tears of joy. The project staff told us later, she had never been so happy in her life, just watching the expression on Nikhil's mother's face!

On the day of the operation, there was a whole network of people praying all over the zone, spread over the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. Several people in the Zonal office in Pune were fasting and praying for Nikhil's operation to be successful. The operating Surgeon told me afterwards, that he was surprised that several of the project staff sat outside the Operation theatre with Nikhil's parents waiting just like anxious relatives. He had observed several of them praying, and had not known of a similar situation anytime in his many years of work. The operation itself went perfectly as planned. I had kept close track of all the events, and monitored Nikhil's progress during and after the operation. When he came out of anesthesia I was standing by his side and returned soon after to send out a message to all our partners that he was well. A week later I went to visit Nikhil again in the ICU of the hospital. This time there were complaints from the doctor in charge and the nursing staff. They were unable to keep a control on Nikhil, because he was jumping out of bed and wandering around. All the medication and the special nourishing food he was getting and his repaired heart were giving Nikhil more energy and vitality than he was ever used to coping with. He was going berserk!

In record time Nikhil was discharged from the hospital. A month later he was jumping and playing more than any other of his peers. I remember around that time a group from Finland had visited the project, and met with him. They had heard that he had had surgery but were not sure they actually understood the nature of it because of difficulty of language. Could the project staff have been talking about heart surgery? They were surprised that he was so active after any surgery, let alone major surgery!

Later during the next Operations meeting I had a surprise for my team. During the morning devotions, I told them that we would be having a special guest for Lunch. As the day progressed we were very busy with urgent issues that needed attention, so I didn't think about Nikhil and his mother till I saw them come into the annex of the conference room with our jeep driver, Ranjit Sharma. "Let's continue the rest of the discussions after lunch", I announced "our special guest for lunch is here". I called Nikhil and his mother into the conference room. He was playing with a toy car, and looked very shy trying to look for familiar faces and recognizing only very few. The effect on the rest of my field colleagues was electric. They immediately recognized him from having seen his photograph, and all of them wanted to come to him and hug him. Suddenly, little Nikhil was surrounded by a whole lot of strange people who seemed to know his name and wanted to pick him up and hug him. In fear he clung to his mother, dropping the toy car that he was holding. His mother picked him up as he continued to cling to her. "Say 'Namaste' to all these wonderful people" she said with tears streaming down her face "it is because of them that you are alive and well today!" There was no need to say more, or express anything. The efforts of the team had helped a mother save her child. The joy and gratitude on her face was so powerful that the lunch time was one of celebration!

Involvement with Nikhil had shown each of us what we could achieve if we were determined. A lesson that enabled all my team members to consistently lead the National Fund raising efforts for years after that! 'God's work, done God's way, never lacks God's supply'- some one has said.

How true!

MR. "MOTHER TERESA"

The discerning reader has probably noticed by now that Mother Teresa is one of my favorites! I have several stories in this book related to her. Yet, even I was quite surprised to come across a person who was referred to as 'Mr. "Mother Teresa"'!!!

In late 1996 our project staff was becoming increasingly aware of the number of street children in Mumbai's Marol area where the *Network 21 Urban development project* was operating. Many of these children were brought to the project's notice by a street child called *Subash*, who had literally thrust himself on the project. Subash was from a broken home with a very complicated situation, and to avoid being beaten by his "step mother", spent most of his time on the street. He often followed the staff around on their daily visits and hung around with them as they returned to the office for lunch. He had no way to get food, and was too proud to beg, and had to actually be invited to join them for food!

It wasn't long before he was a regular fixture around the office, whenever I visited the project as the Zonal Director of the Region where the project was. I was always fascinated with the love each of the staff demonstrated in their service to the community. They pooled

their lunch boxes together to put together some food for Subash, and those like *Heather Ferraira* who had children brought him old school books to learn from. He never lacked care and I don't think I have seen a more content child. He was brilliant, and could follow all the discussions that were taking place in the office. We were finally able to get him into a boarding school for children like him, but before he left he had taken us to several places where street children like him stayed. This was a new challenge, that we recognized required people with special skills to look after.

I encouraged the staff to consider separating this out as an activity for working with street children and to find a suitable staff to work with it so that they could give their whole attention to the HIV/AIDS program. I had just finished seeing a film about street children called 'Salaam Bombay' and the name "Shalom Bombay" (considering what was possible in the case of Subash) presented itself. I shared with the Project Manager *Krupa Shinde* and the staff a vision I had after seeing the movie, of a social worker who was so tuned to the needs of street children that he just sat by them on the street corner and talked to them, convincing them of their need to be a part of the Programme. I had even seen what this person looked like and how he dressed in jeans and a *Kurta* with a *Jhola* (cloth bag) slung over his shoulder. As I spoke I noticed the staff exchanging glances and whispering to each other. Finally one of them burst out, "you are talking about 'Mr. "Mother Teresa" ' she said. I was surprised at the strange name, and saw everyone laugh. I was told that they all knew a person who was exactly how I had described, but would probably not fit into World Vision (or for that matter any organization!) because of his style of working. The person, I was told was a man called John Abraham who believed in caring and loving without restraint. If he saw someone on the street who needed help-he just gave it with whatever he had available with him. His wife had learned fast enough and stopped asking him to do any shopping for her. Without a doubt the money would be given off to someone in need. When he found a

person without a place to stay, he just brought them home. If they didn't have clothes, he just gave off some of his to them! Little wonder then that he had got the name he had!

As things would have it, after much debate and discussion, we interviewed John and took him on as the social worker responsible for street children. Under his leadership the program grew unbelievably. Children who had never been to school were studying, had cleaned up, and learned discipline. Sometimes the street children looked more cared for than the ones with parents! We thought earlier that we knew most of the street children in the cover area, but now new ones were being identified, and they were storming in like bees. The work increased considerably and Krupa was thinking of providing an assistant to John. To her surprise, when she went to visit him at his work place one day, she found someone already helping him. On asking, she was told the name of the young person was Solomon Missal and that he was working as an unpaid volunteer. On my next trip to Mumbai to visit the project, I interviewed Solomon. He was a quiet soft spoken person with a deep faith in the lord Jesus Christ. He was a graduate from the state of Orissa, and was staying with John along with many other homeless people that he had given shelter to. He was fond of music and composed songs, and was a good singer too. When I asked him what his motivation was, he told me he believed God had called him to serve 'street children' and that he intended to continue to help John as a volunteer even if we didn't give him a job! I looked at this young person that seemed to have this strong call and asked him what had brought it about, and out came the story.

Solomon Missal was born and raised in a village in Orissa. After completing his school studies he went to a University and completed his graduation. After searching at length for a job, he was overjoyed to get an interview call from an organization in Mumbai. With all the savings he had, he bought a train ticket to Mumbai. Without a place to stay till the interview, he slept on the street, only to find the next day that all his belongings had been stolen including his

certificates and even his interview letter. A simple small town boy like him was not prepared for the harsh streets of Mumbai. In desperation he searched day after day for his belongings as the date for the interview came and passed. He didn't remember the address and so was unable to get to the place. In this frame of mind he sat on the street corner, all hopes shattered and desperately praying that God would send some help. And guess who came along? John Abraham! He took him home to stay with his family and share the food they had. It was here that Solomon made a personal commitment to the Lord Jesus to serve street children!

We gave Solomon the job as John's assistant and the two of them did a great job. With my special concern for street children, I always also made it a point to visit their work whenever I was in Mumbai. In the days and months that followed the work continued to grow, so also the complaints. John was no respecter of systems. If he saw a need, he met it with the resources he had available with him. This obviously lead to constant tussles with the accounts department who insisted that money obtained as advance for a specific purpose must be used for that alone, not to feed someone who was hungry or needed medical treatment! John's typical rejoinder to that would be "fine, then just deduct it from the salary you will pay me". There were other complaints too about the office serving as a place for home-less people to take shelter during the floods! When counseled, John could not see why this was wrong! Despite these struggles, the work continued well.

In March 1999, I met the team for the last time during a retreat for the staff working in the state of Maharashtra at which I was speaking. It was an emotional time for me as I bid farewell to the colleagues I had worked so closely with. We had worked together through some difficult and challenging situations and seen God's abundant provision and blessing. I was leaving World Vision India to work with World Vision International in Cambodia. I was busy in my new assignment and didn't have much feedback about how the project was doing, but continued to pray for all of them. It was only in 2002, while working

in China, I was on the preparatory mission for the visit of the Chinese delegation, that I had a chance to visit the project to explore the possibility of having them also visit Mumbai as it was on our route.

When I visited the project with the new Project Manager Mr Bob Jacob, I was excited to see the changes and developments. The HIV/AIDS program had grown and matured tremendously. There was a very active support group of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) that was also acting as peer educators and councilors. We had never dreamt 3 years earlier that there would be a group of housewife PLWHA that openly declared their positive status and reached out to others. When I asked the question I had been waiting to ask about Abraham and Solomon, there was silence. "John has launched off on his own "they said. He found it hard to continue to work with us, but we are still good friends. We offered Solomon a chance to join our HIV/AIDS program as we had decided to discontinue the street children work, but he decided to leave and continue to work with street children. We don't have any street children work now".

After I completed the preparatory mission trip, I had to drop project visits in Mumbai from my schedule in view of the tight flight schedule. It wasn't until later this year when I returned to Cambodia that I heard from Solomon Missal. Someone had passed on my e-mail address to him and told him I was enquiring after him. It was a joy to hear that he was still continuing with the ministry of serving street children. He had found a wife who had the same burden and together the two of them were looking after 8 street children. I sent Dr Mathew Finney the National Director of World Vision India a short message about Solomon and his dedication to street children, that seemed to follow in the same steps as his mentor 'Mr. "Mother Teresa"'. Dr Finny in turn sent someone to see how Solomon was doing. I was surprised to learn that Solomon and his wife in faithfulness to their commitment were looking after the 8 street children not in a shelter, but in their own home, living with them

and eating the same food they ate. As yet he had no special funding, just a special call and support from friends with concern. I also received a digital photograph of this extended family of 8 children in different ages with their 'Parents' who looked just a little older than them! John Abraham also was doing well I had learned. He had in turn multiplied himself in the person of Solomon and his new Family. What a challenge of selfless giving!

Transformation sometimes calls for the willingness to 'step out and work outside of the system'. As humans we need management systems, but are so often we are prone to let them 'take control and regulate what we do'. It often needed the Lord Jesus 'personal intervention and confrontation to challenge the Pharisees and the leaders of the Synagogue to see that 'the Sabbath was made for Man, and not man for the Sabbath!'

There will be times in life, when we will have to take similar steps, and they will not be easy.

18

OFCOURSE I KNOW WORLD VISION!

“This is the Mobile phone I would like to buy”, I said showing the General services Manger what I wanted. “I like this one too” he replied, “but it costs more than the budget we have allocated for our purchases.”

I had just moved to Cambodia in 1999 to work with World Vision International Cambodia as the head of Operations, and was checking out a Mobile phone. I looked at the alternative phone that came within our budget; it totally lacked the features for efficiency that I was seeking. I looked at the salesman, who was obviously exasperated with our persistence with him to beat down the price. “Can you let me speak with your top boss?” I said. He had obviously met others like me, and had a standard answer for my request. “He is very busy with a meeting with the Regional sales executives”, he said, pointing to a man sitting inside a glass cabin talking animatedly with a group of people who were obviously deeply involved with some pressing issue. I decided to have one last attempt, and requested the sales executive to take my card to the “big boss”. I can never guess what made him oblige. Perhaps it was just to demonstrate to us that we would get a negative answer, he took my card and went

into the cabin of the National Sales Manager of Mobitel-Cambodia.

As my colleague and I looked on from outside, it was clear that the National Sales Manger was not very pleased with the interruption. He looked at the card, and hesitated for a moment. Then, he arose, and seemed to ask a question of the sales executive. A moment later he came outside to meet us. “Greetings. I am Sam-Ath Him Sprung the National Sales manger of Mobitel. Please, can you come inside?” he said, as we followed him surprised into the room. He dismissed the people sitting around him and waited for us to be seated. “We are from World Vision” I began, “World Vision is an International Relief & Development organization...”

“Of course I know World Vision” said Mr Sam-Ath. “It is because of World Vision that I am alive and, in fact here in this very important job”. It was now our turn to be surprised. The stern look was suddenly gone from his face and his eyes looked glazed as he recalled what had happened years ago, taking us through a most fascinating story.

As the Khmer Rouge came into Phnom Penh and changes began taking place in their initial behaviour, people were running helter skelter preparing to leave the city.

Sam-Ath himself was a young boy at that time with no idea of what was happening. In fact, many young children were waiting at a Pagoda called *Wat Teak Tla* and Sam-Ath was helping the head monk distribute left over food to them when a truck suddenly pulled into the Pagoda grounds. Some foreigners jumped out of the truck and urged the children to get into it and escape. For a few moments the children looked at each other dazed and hesitant, then, young Sam-Ath and many of his friends also allowed themselves to be loaded into the truck. Sam-Ath had no idea of what was happening but it looked like fun so he had joined the others. However, he soon started feeling uneasy and wanted to get down. Suddenly he saw his father come into the pagoda compound in a hurry and talk to the head monk. Sam-Ath jumped off the truck and ran to his father and clung to him. His Father hugged him, and then with determination on his

face put him back in the truck and said, “Go away my son. Flee from here. It is not safe, escape and try to make a good life for yourself. Go with these people, they will help you. I have nothing to give you, I can only pray for you from my heart”.

Those were the last words little Sam-Ath heard from his father as the truck pulled away. Who are these people he wondered? Where are they taking us? When he asked someone, he was told that they were an NGO called World Vision and that they were helping the children to escape from Cambodia. Fear gripped Sam-Ath’s heart as he looked around and noticed all the children were now quiet. Outside they could see that there was chaos and confusion and people were running about screaming in fear. In the distance they could hear gunfire and bombs blasting with shell fire coming down like rain. The whole episode seemed less fun now than it had when he got into the truck. His father’s words kept coming back to him. What had he meant when he said what he did? A few hours later, they stopped at a big building and everyone was asked to get down. The children were made to sit in rows as they were given food and a shawl each to wrap around themselves. Sam-Ath obeyed every instruction he was given. He was too afraid to not do what he was asked. Once, when his courage surfaced, he dared ask someone who these people were who were taking care of them and again he was told that they were the staff of World Vision.

Later that evening, as darkness fell, the children were once again loaded into the truck and driven off. Where are we going now he wondered? Someone said something about the Airport. That is a place very far away from home Sam-Ath remembered, but he was too scared to say anything. His Father’s words came back to him....somehow the firmness in his voice as he told him to go became his reassurance. He huddled up in a corner with the other frightened children. There was nothing else to do but to wait and see.

When the truck reached the airport, Sam-Ath had fallen asleep. In a daze he woke up, and followed the others as they ran in a group to

the bunkers. After being in the bunkers for over 2 hours they heard an aircraft hovering over them. As soon as the aircraft landed, they were all asked to run quickly towards it. At the door of the aircraft two foreigners were lifting and putting children one by one into the craft. Sam-Ath stood in the fast moving line and soon he too was inside the airplane. He was still in a daze as he sat in a metallick chair inside, not sure if this was a dream or not. He decided to do what everyone else was doing and just obey. Someone came to him and tied a belt across his lap. Sam-Ath rested back; he heard the roar of the airplane engines and was soon fast asleep. Later, when he awoke, he saw someone shaking him, and giving him something to eat. He ate this quietly and went back to sleep. When the plane landed, again he quietly rose and joined the rest of the children as they walked out in a group. The events after that were vague. He remembered stumbling along with the others till thankfully they were given a mat to lie upon and sleep. When he woke up the next morning, he was aware that he was in a large building along with many, many others like him. All of them seemed to be speaking in *Khmer*, and the air seemed to smell different and the surroundings were quite unfamiliar; but Sam-Ath was reassured to see some of the men were the same kindly persons who had rounded them up at the Wat. He decided that he was still on track, going with the people his father had told him to go with. The events after that were like a frenzy. Days together in one place, then boarding (what he now was sure to be an Airplane) and long hours of the continuous roar, before being asked to get up and walk together. He soon got used to it. Sleep, wash, eat, walk in a group sit in a chair, and hear the endless roar, sleep and wake and walk again in surroundings that were ever so much more unfamiliar. One thing however seemed to keep him going without fear. Every time he slept, he saw his Father and heard him say the same things he had said as he put him on the truck, and each time his response to his father was the same, “Yes, *Apuk* (father), I will”

The surroundings now were completely different from anything

he had ever seen in his life. He learned that the organization that set out to help him- World Vision , had first flown him to a Refugee camp in Thailand, and from there brought him for a few days to Phillipines and then took him ultimately to the United States of America. The sky was a different color, and there were huge buildings all around, bigger than he had ever seen in his life. The air smelt different, and was very cold, but most of all he was relieved that there were no more sounds of gunfire or of bombs exploding. Sam-Ath was grateful that he had been given new clothes and a jacket to wear and shoes. He wished his parents could see him now. The thought about his Mother sent a chill through his heart. What would he tell her? He had lost track about how many days he had been away. Surely this was longer than he had ever been away from his parents. Did they miss him as much as he missed them, he wondered?

The excitement of his new surroundings and new adventures soon made thoughts about his home a distant dream. He was now sleeping on a mattress in a large hall with many children, and though he didn't like the food he was given recently, he started trying to adapt to it. After a few days all the children were moved to another city and it was here that Sam-Ath was placed in a Foster home. He remembered a funny incident from that time. He and his friends were given an entrance test in Mathematics to determine how much they knew and which grade they were to be put into. The Principal set 30 questions for each child to do and they were given an hour to do it. It took Sam-Ath and his friends just over two minutes to write down all the correct answers, and then they started playing. When the principal returned an hour later he wondered if he had not left clear instructions on his expectation from the group. He was surprised to see that all the children had got their answers correct!

The school here was also very different but he soon learned to speak English and then learning became more interesting. Sam-Ath missed his old school though, especially some of his close school friends and the games they loved to play in the Pagoda grounds. The

Months passed by and then became years. Sam-Ath was put into a Foster Family and continued his studies. He made new friends in a tough neighborhood. He adapted soon to his life in America, and learned how to cope, making up for his height by learning how to use his fists and hold his own. He soon emerged as a leader with a group of followers willing to do his bidding.

“...and so my life continued” Sam-Ath continued his story, as my colleague and I sat there in his office, hanging onto every word he said. “I was very much a part of what it took to survive, tough, wild, and ruthless. Who knows what would have happened if I had just gone on like that? I’d probably have ended up in prison or a drug addict....but I guess God had Mercy on me, and one day I suddenly woke up because I heard my Father’s words ever so clearly once again. He was telling me to make a good life for myself. I stopped what I was doing, and turned my life around. My friends changed, my ways changed and my life changed. I started studying like I had never studied before.”

“At that time, my sponsors had wondered if I would ever finish school, but I surprised them by topping my class and securing admission in the University. One thing lead to another. I completed my Undergraduate studies with flying colors, and got admission for Graduate studies in Business Management. I wished that my parents could have seen me. My Father especially would have been so proud! And then, I started missing them. I wanted to see how they were. I knew of all the horrible things that had happened in my Country. I was so young when I left; I had no way of sending them a message, no address to write to. Now I wanted desperately to go back to Cambodia...”

Sam-Ath paused as he spoke. He seemed far away, almost like he was reliving those moments again. I was fascinated by his story, and my heart reached out to him. “You know, I am not a religious person, but that is when I realized that there was a God up there looking after me. I saved up money and in 1992 made a short trip to

Cambodia. I was excited to be back again in my beloved Country. I spent every spare moment I had walking through the streets of Cambodia trying to see if I could find my family...” he paused again, his eyes moistening, and “I found them alright. But so much had happened since I left. My Father was no more, so also many of my relatives. When I saw my mother, it was like an unbelievable miracle for her. She just clung to me and wept, and kept telling me how great a man my father was for knowing what was best for me. Later when all the emotions were past and she had a chance to hear what had happened with me, I heard her recall the story of what had happened the day I left. My Father had returned home and stayed indoors the whole day. My Mother had sat at the steps of our home looking out for me to return. She was upset and harassed, insisting that my father go out and search again. When my Father replied that I was probably safe wherever I was, it triggered off another outburst from her. The commotion had woken up my next older sister who had suddenly remembered that she had seen my Father actually putting me on a truck. All hell had broken loose after that. My Mother took a broom and started beating my Father asking how he could take a unilateral decision like that. He just stood there unmoving; taking the beating like it was penance for what he had done. Finally she had just clung to my Father and wept uncontrollably till she had no more energy to cry. Then she felt my Father hold her and say with a sad and firm voice ‘one day you will understand what I have done for my son’.”

“There had been all sorts of rumors about the fate of those who had left in the trucks. Some said the children had been thrown out from the Airplane while it went over the sea, others said something else. But my mother never believed she would ever see me again. My respect and love for my Father grew tremendously...I wished I would also one day be a Father like him. I knew then that God had some special purpose for me and my family despite all the sufferings we had to endure. Soon I had an MBA and it seemed that there was nothing

too difficult for me. As soon as I graduated I got a call from a lady in Cambodia saying she wanted to recruit me as a Professor in the University because of my bilingual capabilities and my good academic record. I took up this assignment and worked hard at it. During one of the trips with my students to the Coca-Cola Company in Cambodia the General Manager of the unit was observing me closely and asked me to join them immediately. I refused saying that I needed first to complete my assignment with my employers as contracted. Later, when this was completed I did join Coca-Cola and when my assignment with them was finished, I wanted a new challenge and applied to MOBITELE got selected and I've been here ever since! “

I looked at my watch. It was getting late, and despite all we had heard, we still hadn't achieved our first objective. “What about a discount for the Mobile phone?” I asked. “I am sorry, I can't give you a lower price than has already been offered” replied Sam-Ath. “But there is one thing I can do for you because you are with World Vision. I will allow you a very special discount on your mobile bill for the next 10 months. That is the very highest I have given anyone ever!!!” We left his office that day inspired, and of course with a Mobile phone that would be virtually free! I have stayed in close touch with Sam-Ath, and have shared his inspiring story with many people wherever I have spoken. I invited him once to attend an Operations Managers' Meeting and requested him to share his story with my colleagues at a time when they were wondering whether all the work they were doing was ever of any consequence.

Transformation is a process, a Journey. It is a 'work in progress' as it were, as someone moves from what he or she was, to being what they currently are. It is hard to say what exactly initiates that change. Sometimes it happens when someone is moved out of harm's way, into a new and safe environment. Sometimes, even that doesn't work. Sometimes a word in season, at the opportune moment stays latent, hidden within the psyche to surface at the right time....and make all the difference! There is so much else that also plays a role; the circumstances, the cumulative support from

various quarters, Opportunities, events, mental toughness and resilliance of the person concerned...so much that is beyond our ability to order or orchestrate...and then one becomes conscious of the Sovereignty of God in all of it, and the realization that all we can do, is our task, and leave the rest in His hands!

Mr. Sam-Ath Him Sprung still stays in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Under his leadership Mobitel has increased its service areas into several new areas and its customer base several times that which it had when he started working for them. He is married and his wife and he are the proud parents of 5 children - 4 their own and one adopted (adopted as a 2 month old abandoned girl who was brought to their notice). When his youngest son was born, I felt deeply honored that he rang me up and told me that he had named him "Ravi".

19

PE SOKH HUEY

“*Apuk* Ravi, do you want to meet Jamie Morrison?” asked my colleague MinSor one Saturday morning. MinSor and several of the Cambodian staff had taken to calling me ‘*Apuk*’ which in *Khmer* means ‘Father’. I guess, it is what happens when you look older than you are, and the gray in my beard just naturally leant itself to giving me that ‘older look’. Both my wife Vimla and I had got used to this, and knew also that it was the Cambodian way to show respect and love so we were in fact happy to be considered parents of some who were pretty close to us in age too!

MinSor’s message especially got me excited because I had been waiting to meet Jamie Morrison ever since I got involved in his case. Jamie’s was an interesting case. He had formerly been sponsoring a child with a Sponsorship support type organization and after faithfully giving his support for three years came to know about some major corruption there. The event had so badly ‘turned him off’ that he had decided never again to be involved in any Charity related work. A little while after that however, when he was on a business trip for his organization, Jamie was watching a Programme on the TV in his hotel room and saw an advertisement for World Vision’s

sponsorship Programme. Something about the advertisement caught his attention and he found himself responding to the appeal by calling back. He was soon a sponsor in a new organization and decided to check it out. A few days later, as promised he received a picture folder and found that he would be sponsoring a little child called *Pe Sokh Huey*. He and his family soon got involved in this and he sent his sponsorship contribution for the child regularly. About a year later he and his wife got a chance to visit the sponsored child and were thrilled to see her and her family. They were tremendously impressed by the work of World Vision and all that was being done not only for Pe Sokh Huey and her family but also for the rest of the community in her village. They were told by the staff who escorted them to the village that World Vision's approach was to *empower the Community to enable the family to take care of their children in a better way*. It was during this visit that they also came to know more about the initial details they had about Pe Sokh Huey. They had read in the 'Child history file' that their sponsored child was undergoing treatment for some problem she faced with her eyes. They now discovered that this was something that had been going on for some time, that she had to be taken to the doctor quite often for treatment of her eyes, in fact she had also been to a specialist who had said her condition was one that needed special treatment facilities for which only existed in a specialized hi-tech hospital in Japan. Jamie requested for and obtained a copy of the specialist doctor's report, and a few days after he and his wife returned home via Japan (his wife is Japanese), a letter came from him through the World Vision Canada office requesting for permission to take the child to Japan for getting the operation done. This had been a most unusual request, and seemed impossible, because when examined in detail would require not just the child, but her mother and a staff from the project to also go. When told about this Jamie was undeterred. He would cover the entire cost he had insisted.

On our part, in World Vision, we too had to do a lot of

examining. We had the child re-examined by a visiting ophthalmologist and were told that this was indeed a unique case. The child had a rare condition, because she had been born without the tear ducts, and it would require a very specialized operation involving a reconstruction of the tear ducts. The cost of the operation was prohibitive in itself, let alone the fact that it would have to be done in a very high tech facility. Back in World Vision we had many debates on this, even some heated ones on whether this was our Ministry or not. Getting involved with this would mean a lot of extra work for many people like working on passports, government permission, visas, explaining to other villagers in the area, etcetera. On the other hand, *further delay would result in disaster!* The Ophthalmologist had told us that the operation was the only hope that Pe Sokh Huey had. Her's was a very complicated case. The absence of tear ducts had resulted in her eyes being devoid of tears, with the result that even the mere rubbing of the eye lids on the eyes resulted in extreme friction causing it to become opaque. There must also have been a lot of pain, but the little child had learned how to cope with it and never complained. With her very limited vision she had found a way to cope, walking with extreme caution, and sitting carefully away from harm's way. The more I considered everything; I realized what my decision would be. If the same thing had happened to my child, I would have opted for the operation. How could I not push with all my might to get permission for this little child to be operated? Hence, with new determination; permission was obtained and "all systems were go" for sending her for the operation.

Jamie Morrison was visiting his sponsored child once before the whole process moved further along, and MinSor the Operations Manager under whose area the project came had told me that this person was now coming to the office to meet me. I had been keen to meet him because of what I saw of his obvious determination to make Pe Sokh Huey's operation a reality. I had earlier presumed that he might not have had children and hence felt this great compassion

for the child, however I discovered that he did in fact have his own children, and in order for him and his wife to be in Japan for the operation, they had to arrange for a relative to fly down to their home in Canada to 'baby sit' their youngest child. My respect grew tremendously for this man, and my keenness to meet him also grew. By the time the meeting had materialized, I had in fact two more people with me, an Australian volunteer who was helping me with some documentation work at that time, and my wife Vimla. Perhaps all that I shared about the case got Vimla interested and she was very keen to meet Jamie. The meeting turned out to be all that I thought it would be. Jamie struck me as being a warm hearted sincere person. We spent some time discussing the logistics involved, and then I asked him the question I had wanted to ask.

“What is the source of your motivation to make this a reality Jamie? Why are you willing to go through with this near impossible task?” He smiled, and seemed to contemplate in his mind what he intended to share. “I guess you are entitled to ask that question, and I am also often surprised at my own determination. I am not a religious person, but years ago when I was studying for a very important examination, I developed some serious problem with my eyes. Try as I did, I couldn't get my eyes to focus on the documents that I had to study. Suddenly in desperation, I decided to pray to God and I made a commitment to Him. If He supported me through this, then after I passed the exam I would repay by helping out anyone else who came to me with a problem with their eyes..”, he paused, as emotion took over. “...so how could I have not responded with all my might when Pe Sokh Huey's need came to my attention? Especially since God had been so faithful in answering my prayer?” Jamie was now crying. I was moved at God's sense of precision, in choosing such a special person to fulfill His purpose!

After Jamie left we proceeded with obtaining a passport for Pe Sokh Huey and her mother. It was a busy time of the year for us with all our other routine work in World Vision, but all those involved

really gave of their free time and persisted. Getting passports for those who don't own any land or property except for a tiny house, we found was a daunting task. Repeated visits were required to the government officials, repeated requests had to be made, and the situation explained to scores of people. Many times the staff came up against a wall and nearly gave up, but Jamie's motivation was their encouragement; and they persisted. Finally all the documents were completed. Even the visa obtained from the Japanese embassy in a miraculous way just a day before the flight. Choup Mony the Project manager who was to accompany Pe Sokh Huey and her mother had been busy at the Russian market getting some warm clothes for them. When the two of them came down to Phnom Penh, it was their first *visit ever* to a big city! We could well imagine what they were going to experience when they traveled by air to Tokyo and then by the 'bullet train' to their final destination!!

The events in Japan were a series of interesting events, and would require several pages to describe. One event before the operation was very significant and I will describe it. The hospital where the operation was to take place was a very high-tech one, and also a very



expensive one. The cost of this facility was prohibitive enough to keep it beyond most ordinary people; and only the very rich people in Japan and abroad was able to afford it. From the way Pe Sokh Huey's mother was behaving, walking around and touching things (the rooms had special lighting that brightened with activity and dimmed and switched off automatically when the person using the room went to sleep) it was obvious to the hotel staff that she had

never seen things like this. Out of curiosity they checked with Choup Mony who told them their background and that they lived in a shack of a house in Cambodia and did not even have electricity in their house! From Mony the hospital staff also learned the circumstances under which Pe Sokh Huey and her mother had come to Japan, about World Vision and about how Jamie Morrison and his wife were involved in paying for all expenses. Word soon got to the Hospital Director and from him to a local TV company who came to interview all of them and interview Mony about the kind of work World Vision did. After the operation was completed a few days later the Director of the hospital personally came to visit Pe Sokh Huey as the bandage was being removed. The events were just like something out of a melodramatic movie. Let me describe it the way Mony described it to me when he returned.

“There was extreme tension in the air as we all stood around Pe Sokh Huey as the nurse slowly removed the bandage. The lights had been dimmed especially to protect her eyes from the strong light. The surgeon who had conducted the operation and the Director of the hospital were also there. As the last bandage came off, Pe Sokh Huey opened her eyes and looked at everyone, including her mother, and then started crying. Her mother ran forward to hold her, only to have Pe Sokh Huey cry even louder. It was only when her mother spoke that she could recognize her. It was the first time in her life that she had been able to see clearly and she was shocked at how people looked! When we realized this, there was joy all around. Jamie and his wife hugged each other and cried. Then the Surgeon moved forward, and tapped Jamie on his shoulder and said. ‘I want to let you know that I did this operation free of charge ‘. Again people were jumping excitedly, especially Jamie and his wife. Following this, before all the excitement could die down, the Director of the hospital announced that the hospital too was not going to charge anything for the operation. Suddenly it was like all our emotions came loose and we were celebrating, and crying at the same time!’

A week later, Jamie's wife's parents invited everyone to their beautiful and immaculate home to have one last celebration before they each departed from Japan. Each person was sharing different parts of the story and their part in it, and rejoicing in how everything had gone so perfectly, till they suddenly realized that Pe Sokh Huey was not in the room. They went out searching and found her busy drawing something with a crayon on the perfectly spotless wall. Her mother immediately offered to clean it up, but Jamie's in-laws were excited at what had been drawn. It was the first thing that Pe Sokh Huey had ever drawn in her life. It was a picture of the sun coming up between the mountains! To this day, Jamie's in-laws have it on their wall. To them it is more valuable than a Picasso!

When the group returned from Japan, there was a fresh round of celebration in Cambodia. The village had organized 2 representatives to go to the airport to see them off when they left, but the whole village was there to received Pe Sokh Huey and her mother when they returned to the village. In the World Vision office too there was a celebration, especially among all those who had played a role in helping make it happen. I remember hearing from so many people that this entire episode was a real modern day miracle. And it sure was. Thinking back now and remembering it all, I am editing out so many details, because it all seems so incredible.

However, I think in many ways an incident like this is a once in a life time experience. It is like God going all out to show what He can do and achieve, as He did in this case. A couple of months later, Pe Sokh Huey had to go to Japan again because of infection at the operation site and some complications; and again after that for another corrective operation. This time her younger sister also went with her for a minor eye operation. On all three occasions, neither the Hospital nor the Surgeon charged anything for their services. On each occasion, Jamie and his wife made the same arrangements to fly down and be there. They covered all the costs of travel and related expenses on all

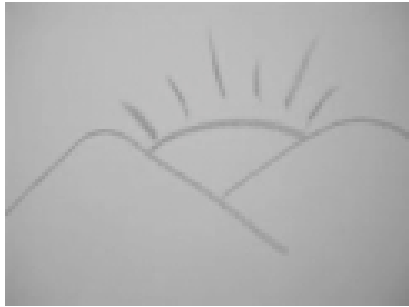
three occasions, their love and concern unwavering. Their determination: as resolute as always!

What is the lesson on transformation from all this? Transformation, though not resource based, comes at a cost. Hard work, and the willingness to 'go the extra mile' for some. Personal cost and persistence and sacrifice for some. The willingness to stand up against all odds and criticism, for others. But above all else, sight and a new life and hope to Pe Sokh Huey. Without the operation by now, she would have gone completely blind. There was no way her family or even World Vision could ever have set aside so much money to have her operated. Today she and her little sister go to school, something that would never have happened without the support of Jamie and his wife. What did we learn from all of this?

- ? *That Transformation takes a lot more effort than we can sometimes imagine.*
- ? *That it takes the combined efforts of many giving far beyond the dictates of their job description*
- ? *That when we are willing to do our bit, someone else is willing to make the sacrifice that we are unable to make*
- ? *That God is at work in the lives of people everywhere and continues to work in them to fulfill His purposes, and that most times we have no idea of it, because we have very limited understanding of what to expect*
- ? *That the actual event is not the only purpose of God's intervention, because He always has a larger purpose. The story of Pe Sokh Huey has since been shared in scores of situations with countless people and is still inspiring people. Jamie's company too got involved in all that he was doing, and wanted to know details. He shared what was happening at several conferences he was attending and more people learned about World Vision*
- ? *That hundreds of World Vision Cambodia staff learned by demonstration the preciousness of life and the practical implications of 'valuing people'*
- ? *That it took a lot of effort to explain to the villagers in Pe Sokh*

Huey's village why we were able to do what we did, without it causing jealousy or generating high expectations for others with needs in the future

? *That it is easy to uphold a value and be proud of it, and humbling to see how far short we fall when we see the Love that others demonstrate so sacrificially*



? *That while transformation is not resource dependent, sometimes it comes at tremendous cost, far beyond what we had ever anticipated!*

? *And, of course, that 'God's work done in God's way will never*

lack God's supply!!'

20

INTERRUPTED SERMON!

While I was planning out the events to be recorded in this book, and planning out the outline, a story suddenly jumped into my mind. It was still quite vague in my mind and I was unable to remember all the details, yet I think it was of enough importance to include here, so I am doing so.

Sometime in early 2001, as I was coming close to the completion of my assignment in Cambodia, we were beginning to see some very interesting changes take place. I am a firm believer in the fact that leaders in an organization must take the initiative to give the correct emphasis to issues of spirituality, rather than leave it to staff functions responsible for Spiritual Nurture and formation. This doesn't mean they have to take over the responsibility for doing it, but show through their involvement that they consider it of sufficient importance. This sends down a message that concern for the Spiritual well-being of staff is not merely an organizational position, but that the leadership truly also considers it their mandate too. As a result, I made it a point to be involved in the morning devotions myself, and be willing to speak at Chapel and elsewhere in field operations, when requested to. During my time in Cambodia I saw many people from

all over Cambodia make decisions to serve the Lord, and it is encouraging to see them still standing firm even today.

On one occasion, a Colleague from the field came to my office with a request. “*Bong?*” he said (this was the word used in *Khmer* for referring to one’s older brother); “I have a request. My Church is going through a very difficult time with relationships. Can you come and speak to us next Sunday?” I was tempted to ask for more details, but he seemed embarrassed, so I just promised to meet him at the office gate on the appointed day and have him show me the way to his Church. I had expected it to be just another Sunday with a general message on relationships and forgiveness. I told my wife Vimla about the plans to go, and she dutifully prepared to come along.

The appointed day came and we were waiting well in advance at the office gate to accompany the brother to his Church. I asked him if he would be translating for me, but he said he was not confident to do it, but that there was another person in his Church who was the ‘official translator’. When we arrived at the Church, there was an unusual atmosphere there. Though all the congregation members were already present, the atmosphere was almost like one would expect at a Funeral. People were silent as though nurturing some deep grief. Even the children were quiet without their characteristic running about and playing. I was introduced to several people, who merely shook my hand and said nothing else. I was beginning to get uncomfortable and Vimla and I exchanged a glance. I noticed the quizzical look on her face, and I was regretting that I hadn’t told her what my colleague had told me about the situation there. On my part I tried to think about the sermon I had prepared. I had searched hard for a sermon on relationships, but as I had waited on the Lord’s guidance, one message kept emerging as the one the Lord wanted me to speak on, and I had finally settled on this. It was a message I had often used, and as I settled in the first pew, waiting for the service to start, I fervently prayed for the Lord to take over complete control of all I had planned to say, to wipe from my mind things

that were not appropriate, and remind me of things I should speak of that He had intended for His people to hear.

The service itself was similar to most Khmer services. A few songs of worship, some announcements, the children moving off to Sunday school and then after a brief introduction I was invited to speak. I began as I usually did in those days, with a few words of introduction in *Khmer*, and sharing something about my family. As I started speaking though, I noticed the heavy tension in the air. I was grateful that there was a translator, because it gave me time to pray in between. I confessed to God my inadequacy, and helplessness. I prayed in my heart as my last sentence was being translated by the interpreted, 'Lord what do I say to them? I have no idea what is wrong, or what they need to hear. All I know is that you know, and that you can meet their every need, just like you have always met mine'. Sitting in the front row, Vimla suddenly noticed what was happening and she gave me her look of assurance. I have never ceased to praise and thank the Lord for this wonderful woman He has given me. I saw that she too was praying and I suddenly felt the load lift off my shoulders. It was like I had suddenly risen on the wings of an Eagle. I felt a release, and freedom in speaking. Above all else I saw the atmosphere in the Church slowly change. I suddenly realized that I was being reminded to talk about things that were not in my notes. I knew that the Lord had done this several times before, and I didn't resist Him. I said all He showed me to speak about. I noticed several people in the congregation had tears flowing down their cheeks. It is unusual to see the *Khmers* cry, but on this occasion they had given up trying to hold back the tears. My colleague who had invited me to speak had his head in his hands and was shaking with emotion. The Pastor in the first row slowly reached out to his wife and they were holding hands (again an unusual thing for the *Khmers*). Their eyes had lit up with unusual warmth, while their cheeks looked like a multi track highway for tears. I knew beyond the shadow of a

doubt that the Lord was in command, and that He had taken over complete control. I was pleased to be 'merely an instrument' in His hands. I had noticed by now that my translator had slowed down with the translation. I was getting close to the end of my sermon, and I wanted to speed it up so I could complete what I wanted to say soon. But the faster I got, the translator was taking longer to translate. I suddenly realized that he too had tears flowing down his cheeks and had paused to pull out his handkerchief to wipe his face. I paused to let him recover his composure, and repeated what I was saying. The translator struggled to speak again and then most unexpectedly, burst out into tears. I just stood there looking on. He was too overcome by emotion to continue. I looked across helplessly to my colleague and beckoned him to come forward. His condition was similar, so there didn't seem much help likely from him either to translate. I knew that this was probably as far as we could go with the sermon. There was more to be said, but obviously there was no more need for it. God had got His message through. I spoke slowly in English with a combination of all the Khmer words I knew. Again there must have been a miracle because they seemed to understand as I reminded them that God, who himself mends and heals was with us and they should pray and seek His healing. I returned to my seat next to Vimla and sat down; my sermon interrupted, and incomplete, but God's purpose accomplished. As I prayed, I felt Vimla's hand take mine, and we both prayed. I lost track of time. I had seen God intervening directly once again, and was grateful that He had in His Grace used me to accomplish His purposes. I heard the Pastor's voice as he took the mike. We heard the congregation singing. This time there was a new joy and enthusiasm in their singing. It sounded



like a Celebration. Later, after the benediction there were many people hugging and shaking hands. I remember shaking hands with almost everyone a couple of times around. Finally, we were on our way. My colleague, who came to show us the way, seemed interested to stay behind, so we took leave from the group and decided to find our own way back home. After a couple of wrong turns, I finally recognized a road that I knew well, and we were soon on the right road to our home.

I squeezed Vimla's hand and said, "Thanks sweetheart for being my prayer partner. Wow that really was something!"

Later the next week, the colleague came to my office once again. He just took my hands in both his and held them and kept thanking me for coming to his Church. He was obviously under a lot of emotion so I didn't say anything. Perhaps at a later date he would come and let me know what happened. He never did, and I never asked him again. I was never asked to go back to that Church and speak. Perhaps they were too embarrassed at what happened during the sermon or the events afterwards. I will never know, and as I think about it now, it doesn't really matter. God had chosen to intervene personally. He is himself the author of transformation and He sometimes chooses to bypass everything to make it happen. He moves in Mysterious ways His wonders to perform. And it is sometimes best to leave things at that!

21

I AM NOT ANGRY WITH THEM BUT MY PEOPLE

The Toyota Hilux bumped along the way back from the village toward Battambang city. It had been a long day and I was tired from a whole week of project visits. It was my first week in Cambodia and I was on what the World Vision Cambodia referred to as an 'Orientation visit'. All week long I had visited a series of different projects and made friends especially with the Cambodian staff. I had read a lot about the history of Cambodia and the entire trauma it had been through. But none of it had prepared me for the things I heard first hand from staff who had been through it all themselves. By the end of the week, the emotion of it all, the heat and the frequent travel on atrocious roads had left me completely exhausted. As we traveled back, I vaguely recalled that I had been quite excited in the morning that it was Friday and that I would be returning to Phnom Penh on Saturday morning to a quiet weekend of resting and reflection. As I sat in the vehicle now, hanging on to the window handle to stop my head hitting the side or roof as we bumped through potholes in the road, I had mixed feelings. The last village we visited was one in which we were actively involved in carrying out Community based integrated mine clearance work. I had been

keen to see the mine clearance work, especially aspects of which could be sustain ably integrated into the activities of the Area Development Programs. During my orientation some of my misconcets about demining programs had been cleared, and I was now aware that there were no short cuts to mine clearance. For a population of little over 11.4 million people Cambodia had as many as 4.8 million active land mines. One out of every 430 people or so was a person affected in some way or the other by land mines. I had observed mine clearance activity from up close. I watched two experienced deminers working for a whole day clearing a small area of land around 10'x4'. They alternated with each other in one hour shifts, one working at demining while the other kept talking to him about what he was doing to ensure he did not lose his concentration. I was told by the team leader that a land mine was about the size of a shoe polish tin and could remain active for as long as 60 years. That while it would not detonate if a truck moved it; the weight of a human was just right to detonate it. These diabolic devices of destruction did not kill but left their victims without one of their limbs, maimed for life. My mind was however troubled with something I had experienced in the last village. I was sitting in on one of the mine awareness community interactions between a social worker and the villagers. As the meeting got underway, and the discussions and interaction got more intense, I noticed an old woman come in using crutches. I immediately noticed her because her missing limb was still bandaged in a stump and it was obvious that she was still trying to get used to the crutches, which looked new. I thought of interviewing her later after the meeting; as the person who was taking photographs of the meeting was also the one who knew both English and the *Khmer* language. However, as I watched, the lady moved into the group, and got straight into the discussion. I was still new to Cambodia, so didn't know enough *Khmer* to understand what she was saying, but she was obviously angry and pointing an accusing finger at the

villagers. The accusations continued throughout the meeting, and as soon as the meeting finished, I asked my translator to help me discuss with the woman.

“Why are you so angry?” I asked her, “Has the project failed you in any way?”

“I am not angry with your Organization”, she replied, looking me straight in the eyes, “I am angry with my neighbors in this village. I am angry with them for having taken me to the hospital when that horrible land mine blew up my leg!”

I looked at her in surprise. Her face was wrinkled and she looked frail and obviously in pain. But her eyes had an unusual fire in them, as she told me through the translator about her family. Her son had recently been killed by a stray bullet fired by some escaping robbers. Her daughter-in-law was in the final stages of pregnancy and able to provide only the least amount of help in agricultural work. She had suddenly found herself to be the only one able to work on her land and take the vegetables to the market for sale. As an old woman, she was barely able to muster up enough energy to do what she could to keep her family alive. Then, one day, working in her field, clearing the surrounding area, she stepped on a land mine and it blew up. As her world collapsed in front of her, and she saw what had happened to her, with her right leg missing below the knee, she took an important decision. She wanted to die. And that is what she told everyone who came to help her. She wanted to be left alone and allowed to bleed till death. As an old woman she was barely able to make a contribution to the needs of the home. As a land mine survivor, she would be a burden!

When I returned to my hotel room that evening I took a hot shower, despite the weather. I had hardly been in Cambodia for a few days, but had already got into the habit of having an early dinner like most Cambodians. According to my new custom, I had an early dinner and returned to my room. My heart was heavy and I had a sense of deep grief in my heart as I let myself into the room. I got

down on my knees and prayed to the Lord. I told Him all I had heard and seen and how I felt. It was like a torrent of things that I just spoke out to get off my chest. 'I don't understand this pain and sorrow' I told Him. 'I can never understand fully why the Cambodians had to go through this type of grief and sorrow. But I know this, that if you want me to serve you here, you have to pour your Love into my heart and let it flow through me to them'. I felt helpless that night, and have no idea how long I was there on my knees and praying. But this I do know, that I had an immense sense of Peace and comfort when I finally got up and switched off the lights and slipped into bed. *God did honor that prayer request and in the two years I was in Cambodia I saw repeated evidence of God's love outpoured. Above all else, God continued to show me that involvement with Transformation was His mandate for every one of His children, and that it was He who determined when it would take place and how. However, before we get busy involving ourselves in the task of transformation, it has to first begin with us. The agent of transformation himself (or herself) has to experience it first before being used by God to transform others. Submit yourself therefore as a willing-living-sacrifice to be prepared, molded and blessed by God to be used for His purposes.*

Transformation is also a series of experiences throughout different stages in our lives, not just a one time event.



NO MORE TRANSLATORS

“Ravi, there is a special request for a consulting opportunity with a Bilateral government program involving the Beijing government. Are you interested?” asked Dr Toby Lin the Chief Operating Officer of World Vision International-China as soon as I answered the phone. I asked for details, and he gave them to me. The consultancy was related to a larger Bi-lateral Programme between the governments of Australia and China. I was to facilitate a special interactive study tour for a high powered Chinese delegation from the Central government to visit and study Participatory poverty alleviation approaches in countries where it had worked. How did they end up asking for me? Well, as it turned out, the special interactive study tour was to be facilitated by a person well versed with Development and Participatory techniques, with experience working in India & SriLanka, and who was also familiar with China’s unique context. With that kind of selection criteria, the search had obviously narrowed down to me!

On my part, I was delighted to be involved, despite the fact that it would be a massive task to organize and coordinate. Working in China involves interacting closely with the government. Unless the

government is convinced about something, there is little hope of getting things mobilized in China. Here was now an opportunity to have an influence on Government programs and Policy at the National level, especially in an area that I had strong concerns about- *Participatory Poverty Alleviation and Development*. I researched the issue including reviewing the 'terms of reference' of the assignment, and sent out messages to all my contacts in various places in India and SriLanka. The group would have some members from the LGOP (State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development), FCPMC (Foreign Capital Project Management Center), the Planning commission, the Agriculture Bank of China, and the Advisor to the LGOP. The LGOP, I discovered, is a very high powered council of 23 members from different parts of China who steered the entire Poverty Alleviation & Development work for the People's Republic of China. If there was a group that needed to be convinced that Community Participation and involvement is essential for development Programmes to be effective in China, then this was the group. What a wonderful opportunity to have wide scale impact! After several meetings and discussions, the group was identified and ready. It was a big delegation of 17 people, and I would have them with me for close to 2 weeks for daily interaction and discussions after each visit for 'lessons learned' assessments and reflection on applications to China. Considering the seniority of the group, there were issues of sensitivity that had to be considered, hence I was to first make a trip by myself to explain these and also do a quick review of the entire schedule before the actual trip. As I designed the Programme, I planned for meetings with the Governments in India and SriLanka at the Ministry level, and at other levels - Central Government, State Government and District Government. I also planned for visits to Various NGOs of different sizes and degrees of operation. I included a few very small NGOs which I knew were doing very good work and had wide scale impact. Since I had a particular concern about HIV/AIDS and the widespread damage it

was potentially going to cause in China, I made special attempts to include an organization which was also working with HIV/AIDS affected people so that the team could meet and interact with *people living with HIV/AIDS* (PLWHA). I hoped that this would perhaps let them see the connection between development and HIV/AIDS, and not think of it as a health issue alone.

After several weeks of preparation, and many frantic phone calls and last minute arrangement for visas and permissions, the program



was finally ready for launching in the third week of September 2002. We flew from Beijing to Hong Kong and then to Colombo via Bangkok, arriving a little past midnight. After a few minor hiccups with checking in (there was a World cup cricket series going on in Colombo, and some people who had intended to check out extended their stay because their teams were still

playing!), the program went off perfectly! We visited 2 organizations in Colombo and had a time of interaction with members of other National NGOs from all over the country. The meeting with the Minister of *Samrudhi* and other senior Government officials was a grand success. Interestingly, the word '*Samrudhi*' means 'prosperity' in Sinhalese. A very proactive way of talking about the poverty reduction Programme!

I had used some of my contacts in the corporate sector to make all the logistics arrangements related to the hotel bookings and travel arrangements, so we got some very good rates and excellent accommodation during the whole trip. We were able to stay at some of the best hotels in each of places we visited. I thought that was the best compensation I could give them considering that I had extremely busy schedules for them at every place! In fact one of them came to me during the trip and said, "*Cjzya Boshu*", addressing me by the

name I am known in China, “you have arranged the best places for us to stay, but we are hardly getting a chance to stay in the room!!” That was indeed true, for we left early in the morning and didn’t return till late in the night!

From Colombo we flew to Chennai in India, and visited a World Vision Urban development project followed by a visit to the head office and a brief discussion with Dr. Mathew Finny the National Director. Another intense day, a quick rest overnight and we were off again early in the morning to Madurai, a city full of Temples in the South of India. The ‘Taj Garden retreat’ where we were staying was a truly beautiful place. Situated on a hill, it had a beautiful view of the city. The setting itself was very beautiful, with the cottages well designed and spread out. While driving around there were signs everywhere asking people to be cautious of hurting Peacocks that kept prancing around the premises!

After ‘checking in’ we were on our way to visit the field programs of SPEECH in Madurai with their founder-Director Mr. John Devavaram. It was very hot in Madurai, with the sun scorching overhead as we reached the village. We took part in some of the cultural activities in the village, and this was good because many of the delegates had never visited India before. After that we walked around the village, interacting with the community and learning about how they were able to develop a participatory water resource development program that had resulted in an increase in their Agriculture output and sustainable livelihoods for them. After the visit we spent time with John and his talented team discussing their *Modus Operandi* and learning more especially about how they interacted with the District Administration. The evening at the hotel was one of the only relaxed evenings we had. The delegation loved the ambience and the food, and slept well at night. The next morning they were full of energy and enthusiasm to get going. Our plan was to visit the project of another NGO and then to return to the hotel, pick up our bags and leave for the Airport,

from where we were to fly to Mumbai and then take a connecting flight from there to Ahmedabad.

As we traveled, I noticed the delegates showing each other the photographs they had taken on their digital cameras from the previous day's visit. We were just at the beginning of the interactive study tour. I was glad they were all so enthusiastic. On my part I was concerned about the project we were on our way to see. It was a small project that was working with vulnerable women, many of whom had been affected by HIV/AIDS because of the high risk lifestyle they had to adapt due to extreme poverty. I had included this in the schedule because I had noticed during my initial travel around China, the extent of high risk behavior there. At the same time those from the poverty alleviation department believed that HIV/AIDS was not such a serious issue and that it was something that was the responsibility of only the Ministry of Health. My purpose was to show the strong link to poverty, and I was very happy that the weather was perfect as we reached the project.

At the project, there was big group of people waiting for us. The women were dressed in colorful saris, and the few men present were in spotless white shirts and *Pajamas* and *Veshtis*. After the initial greetings and pleasantries the project Manager Mr. Raja Solomon shared with us about the project and their activities. He introduced several of the people who the project was working with and translated from Tamil into English as they shared their personal stories with the visitors. Our group translator was in turn translating from English to Chinese for the delegation.

When the Chinese get emotional they keep clearing their throats, hood their eye lids, and look at their feet to avoid showing their emotions to others. I noticed the whole group doing this, and I was not surprised because the stories we heard from individual women and mothers were stories of tremendous pain and loss. There was a prolonged silence after the last statement from Raja Solomon as he waited for the Chinese translation. I suddenly noticed our lead

translator was crying. Immediately, one of the others stepped in as he sat down, angry at himself for making such a public spectacle of himself. The translation continued for a few more minutes till our second translator also broke down. This time the crying was visible and vocal. I had not anticipated such a strong impact. I stood up and requested another person whom I knew could translate. With great hesitation she stood up and continued the translation, only to break down in tears too. I felt helpless, seeking for someone who might be of help.

“There are no more translators “I was told.

Looking around, I realized that there really was no need for anything more to be said. The Community had reached out and touched the hearts of the Chinese delegation more powerfully than any words could ever have. They now sat in silence and watched the visitors as they battled with their emotions and some just giving up and weeping helplessly. Soon some of the women from the community also started weeping, and went across to the visitors to console them. This was unbelievable! They were actually apologizing that they had caused them so much sadness! Raja Solomon and John came to me asking what was to be done. I said we would just wait for sometime for the group to be able to collect its emotions. Half an hour later, the situation was still very much the same with the exception that those in the Chinese delegation who were angry with the translators for showing emotion were also crying. Some of the delegation members had gone across to the people who shared their stories, and being unable to say anything, had just held their hands. Those were very powerful moments and moving scenes that still remain etched in my brain as I write this. I prayed silently, thanking God for letting this happen, and that He would take it from there when the delegation returned to Beijing and from there to wherever these individuals were located.

When we returned to the hotel to pick up our bags and check out, there was silence all along the way. When the delegates returned with their bags, they had washed and were sporting weak smiles to

cover up their obvious discomfort. I wonder why people are so embarrassed to cry. Sometimes the circumstances in poverty ridden situations can be so compelling that it is hard to hold emotion back! Nobody spoke about the visit for the next couple of days as we flew to Mumbai and from there to Ahmedabad.

Once in Ahmedabad, we were back to our intensive schedule. The trip was one of the most intensive and exhausting ones I have ever been on. It is hard to comprehend as I look back, that I did the whole trip twice within the space of a month and a half (once as a reconnaissance mission trip and once with the large group. We traveled over 20,600 Km by air, train and road. We met and interacted directly with over a 1000 people. We met people at all levels: Ministers, Director Generals, Chairpersons, Managing Directors, Principal Secretaries, Additional Secretaries, Academicians, Administrators, Planners, Project Managers, Community Development workers, Doctors, Nurses, Mobilizers, Village leaders, Self Help group members, Women's groups, Participatory Irrigation Management groups, Women's cooperatives, Milk producers Cooperatives, NGO leaders, NGO workers, Volunteers, Villagers, Abandoned women, Commercial sex workers, People living with HIV/AIDS, and so many others. It is hard to believe it all actually happened!

The continued interaction over the two weeks had made us all into fairly good friends. However it wasn't until we were on the last lap of the journey, as we were traveling back to China, that one of the delegates came to me on the plane. She was obviously determined to say something but had not decided on how to start. I made it easier for her by saying I knew she had 'something important to tell me, and I was keen to know what it was'. She was relieved as she told me, "this must have been the most intensive trip anyone here has ever been on, and everything we saw and did will have profound impact on us" she paused, and cleared her throat before continuing, "but the one thing that had the biggest impact on all of us was the

time in Madurai when we met with and talked with the people living with HIV/AIDS!” It was a carefully considered statement, and I knew it mirrored the sentiment of the entire group. Later, when we returned to Beijing and in the days that followed the impact became clearer. Members from this delegation were literally spokespersons for the cause of HIV/AIDS prevention. They had seen the results of the damage that HIV/AIDS could do from up close; and they saw the strong bearing it had on their work in poverty alleviation. I will never really know the full impact of that visit, but I had noticed a major shift in attitude toward AIDS in China in the last few months I was in China and now more recently on attitude change toward programming.

What was achieved through all of this? Was it worth taking on a responsibility so huge and exhausting? I believe it was definitely worth it. By working closely with the group and interactively dealing with their questions, I was able to show them the valid role of NGOs in the development process, the role and impact of Community participation in planning and implementing Poverty alleviation programs, and the close interaction between HIV/AIDS and Poverty. In succeeding workshops the delegates shared their learning and endorsed wholeheartedly for incorporating Community Participation as an intrinsic part of the Poverty reduction program. It now is actually a part of National policy!

Never underestimate the potential of what can happen when you are wholly available to God for His intervention; and never - NEVER, underestimate what He can do and accomplish in people!

23

FACILITATOR

As far back as I can remember it had always been my dream to work at some stage or the other in China. I was fascinated by this country which had an ancient history like my own country India. So when the discussions with Dr. Toby Lin of World Vision International China got underway, I was excited.

“We are excited at the possibility of you coming to work with us in China” Toby told me when we spoke over the phone, “we are still benefiting from your training of our teams in 1999”. I had been to NanChang in JiangXi province in March 1999 just before moving to work with World Vision International Cambodia. At that time, the dream to do something in China had materialized when I trained all the World Vision China team leaders in the use of PRA/PLA techniques; now I was actually going to stay and work closely with the teams there.

Besides the time in China being absolutely fascinating, it was also a time of studying the unique context of China and modifying the participatory tools I was using . In China, one has to work closely with the government and convince them first of strategy. If they are convinced about the strategy, then the work can progress well, if

not, then all efforts are in vain. I have spoken elsewhere about the experience with the leaders in the LGOP (Local Council of Government for Poverty Alleviation) and the FCPMC (Foreign Capital Project Management Center) so I will mention more here about the associations with the staff and others in China.

When I went to China, I went with another dream. That when I completed my assignment in two years I would return speaking the language fluently, and also be able to write some basic Chinese. That unfortunately didn't happen, because I discovered that Chinese is a very difficult language to learn. During my first few days in China, when I got past learning about 25 Chinese characters, I asked a colleague how many more I needed to learn to be able to read a news paper. I was told 'at least 3000'. Well that was the end of my effort to learn! During my farewell speech at the end of my assignment in May 2003, in NanNing, GuangXi, I made an observation regarding speaking *PuthugHua* (Mandarin). "I believe Chinese can only be spoken by God and the Chinese people.... since I am neither, please excuse me for not speaking in Chinese!" My inability to pick up Mandarin, in essence was my only disappointment with the stay in China. The rest of the time was really great. I had excellent friends in the GuangXi arts college and this gave me opportunity to attend Programmes and performances there. I learned a great deal about Chinese culture there and also from numerous local Chinese friends in GuangXi, Yunnan, Xian, LanJhou, and Beijing. I grew to like the music, and had quite a collection of VCDs and CDs of Chinese music. I learned a great deal about Chinese art and painting from several artists whom I met. You have to learn the culture of the people in order to get to understand them. Because of their rich cultural inheritance, this was really a pleasure in China. I visited some of the most beautiful parts of China like Hina Island, BeHai, KunMing, GuaiLin, Yong Xuo, BeiJing, Xian, LanJhou, DongXiang, DeBao, MahSan etcetera. China has some very beautiful natural scenery that has to be seen to be believed. I also met some wonderful local people

and also those working for the government in the places where I worked. I met several people from the expatriate community too, and made some good friends there.

As I reflect on my time in China, and try to put a description to my role there, at this point of time I could best describe it in the words of my designation- 'Ministry Facilitator'. The time there was essentially of Facilitating. Facilitating - contacts between different people whom I came to know with different work there. Facilitating - those that were going through struggles; by encouraging them to see beyond the struggle. Facilitating - those that needed capacity building, and equipping, to see the bigger picture. There were no significant major breakthroughs in perspective change leading to dramatic transformation, but there were plenty of nurturing and encouraging and counseling experiences! It was almost like an 'extra sensory perception' for me that I could spot people like this with needs; and then go over and talk to them. There were many like that, and I do not want to mention names here. They would be discouraged and in need of encouragement. They would be passing through confusion and doubt and need clarification. They would be disoriented and needed guidance. They would be disappointed and need boosting ('heart massage'-the Chinese called it). I was able to facilitate those transitions for many people and kept them on my special prayer list, sending them encouraging messages, and sharing with them inspirational quotations; and above all, learning to be available. It was a time and opportunity for helping many people. Many of those I was able to speak to are, as a result, still involved with what they are currently doing. It was a special phase in my own life for a special type of growth. I learned to move from the mainline to the periphery, from the frontline to the background. *From the spotlight, to obscurity!*

Sometimes, the process of transformation is just a question of 'leveling off' and maintenance. It is not always dramatic. There are stages when the only progress is Continuance and the prevention of regress. Those

are stages that are not the ones that we get all excited about being involved with. Yet they are so important and significant. Those are the stages that bring stability to the process. Being involved with this important stage involves moving back from the cutting edge into the background where the shy and discouraged can find you, and feel comfortable to talk with you. In the late 90's I had a favorite quote that I often shared at leadership development workshops. "They who are at the cutting edge have to be sharp". Let me leave you with a useful quotation related to Facilitating. "Those who want to be good Facilitators must learn to be in the background".

It was there in the background that I was able to make the greatest contribution. Designing and developing over 30 training Programmes appropriate to the needs of China. I was able to write 3 books on development that were translated into Chinese for being made available to all the current staff of WV China and for future generations of staff. The English versions of the books have been shared with other National offices in the Partnership and with other NGOs around the World!

Yes, every stage is significant!

24

I AM IN THE WRONG BUSINESS

The group of Chinese delegates arrived in Phnom Penh and had checked into their hotel safely. I had waited for this event from way back in May 2003 when the delegation was originally scheduled to visit, but the *SARS* scare had resulted in serious travel restrictions, resulting in postponement. Now that everyone was here, I was happy and satisfied that I could complete my final contribution to China - the equipping and challenging of the leadership in South China to take up the issue of HIV/AIDS and put an appropriate response in place. The planning for the visit itself had been carefully done. The group that consisted of 22 senior government officials from South China and 11 World Vision International - China staff had been carefully chosen, and visits to various places had been carefully planned. On the first day the group was to visit *Mith Samlanh*, an organization that specialized in working with street children and young vulnerable migrants. The group was to learn the various programs related to street children (an issue that will soon become a reality in South China) and look at the way that young migrants were being helped including prevention for them ending up in prostitution and drug addiction. This was to be followed by a visit

to project sites with World Vision Cambodia along with the Home Care teams to see first hand the plight of people living with HIV/AIDS and understand the ways in which to work with them. After the visit, the group was to meet with a panel of experts with long standing experience in working with HIV/AIDS affected people and find out WV Cambodia's strategy for countering the disease. In succeeding days the group was to visit the Hospital run by HOPE Worldwide to see how they had worked on creating an environment where HIV/AIDS affected people were given the same care as others without discrimination as well as to visit and study their community based care Programme. After this there were visits planned to the Ministry of Urban development, and discussions with the Ministry of Rural development to understand their mandate. On the final day there were plans for a meeting with the Secretary General of the National AIDS authority for Cambodia to learn from them about the strategy they followed to achieve a reduction in the disease. The penultimate plan was to also meet with the members of the Senate of the Kingdom of Cambodia and understand from the very top leaders in the country how they went about establishing a law related to HIV/AIDS prevention in Cambodia.

I was very happy with the details of the design for this visit, because it was to provide practical experience (some delegates had never seen a person affected by AIDS), and give information and enable the necessary discussions with the authorities in Cambodia (something that was essential for the Chinese Government officials) to learn directly from them on the struggles of launching a government Programme. Ever since I went to China and saw the situation that was there related to HIV/AIDS, I felt burdened to do something about it. I did part of this when I facilitated a session for the leadership team in WVI-China planning the Country future strategy, I emphasized this a great deal, and at every opportunity thereafter during National Staff training, and every meeting that I attended, including with the high level LGOP Government team

from Beijing (story in Chapter 22). Nothing, it seemed, could go wrong with the plans for this visit. Everything had been precisely planned, cross checked, confirmed and reconfirmed! But then, like someone has said, an important thing to remember is that when “something can go wrong, it will”. I had checked out everything, except one small detail. The translator. We had requested for a professional translator from Khmer to Chinese to avoid wasting time and this now, it seemed was the weak link in our Programme. My *Khmer* was rusty and still quite inadequate to track accuracy of information, and of course my *Mandarin* left a lot to be desired! As it turned out, the ‘professional translator’ we got was the best there was, but he had specialized in taking groups of Chinese businessmen and visitors to places of historical significance! Little wonder then that he was always looking for opportunities to point out and describe the various monuments that were on the way as we moved from one place to the other. Soon he had the group distracted with all kinds of information on the history of Phnom Penh and the significance of



the various tourist attractions. To add to it, the Chinese officials also seemed to be hanging on to every word he was saying. Try as much as I did, I kept getting more and more irritated at this unexpected ‘sabotage’ of my ‘well planned schedule’. On several occasions, I pointed out to *Benny Lor* (for that was the name he had on his card) that we had set aside time in the evening to visit places of interest, so he should let people concentrate on what they were here to do. By the evening of the first day, I was close to becoming agitated, because the delegates would get back into the bus, after a visit and request him to continue with the story he was telling them! I decided to take him aside the next morning before the trip, and tell him again. At the same time I was praying for the Lord to give me His Grace to say it as kindly as possible, because Benny Lor was after

all trying to do his best, and he was also quite an enthusiastic person.

The next day, we were quite busy organizing the groups into different vans, that the plan to take him aside and admonish him didn't work out. In any case, the teams were all going to the outskirts of the city so there was not likely to be any distraction. I decided to wait till evening. We got busy with the visit, the discussions and the interviews with the people living with HIV/AIDS. Through the maze of events, I hardly had time to discuss anything with anyone, but when the sessions finished in the evening, I noticed that Benny Lor was looking quite pensive. Perhaps one of the others had admonished him, so I didn't say anything. The following day too he looked pensive and very serious, translating things as they were said without any additions of his own. Also while traveling through the city I noticed him sitting quietly and peering outside the window. Looking at him like that, I felt sorry for him and even a little guilty at my attitude of anger and impatience towards him. I was glad I hadn't had the opportunity to pull him aside and scold him!

The group met every night after dinner for reflection and collection of feedback, and I was spending some time every morning after that with Kelvin Yau the Area coordinator and Victoria Wen the project Manager to find out how the trip had been progressing. They shared that the visit to the homes of People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and the discussions with them had a profound impact. Then surprisingly, they shared with me some of the unexpected outcomes of the visit too. They told me that on the second day Benny Lor the translator had started weeping when he was translating for one of the people with HIV/AIDS. He broke down and couldn't go on talking. It was like he empathized with the person. Finally, the team had to rely on another local staff translating things into English first, and then translate it into Chinese. Fortunately by the end of the visit Benny had recovered, and though considerably subdued, was once again able to translate. It was now my turn to feel bad. I resolved to be more patient in

future, and trust God to make changes in people rather than be the one to try to do it all!

I decided to try and encourage Benny. I was now actually missing the smile and enthusiasm that had so irritated me earlier.

When I spoke to him in the evening, his jovial nature had once again returned. He looked at me and said, "I am in the wrong job. I am so glad I came here to be a translator. I had no idea when I passed these same places before, how much pain and sorrow there was here. I also never realized what a serious problem HIV/AIDS was. I have learned so much myself, and I want to resign my job and work as a volunteer with you all!!!" Later, he became more pragmatic and said he would wait till after he had helped finance his younger brother through school. However, he stated emphatically, till such time, he would continue to warn others, especially the tourists he would be escorting around the City in future!

Transformation has no specific time or circumstance when it will happen. Often it happens when least expected, to one of whom it is least expected of. From the outside, we have very little idea of what the experiences of people are or, what they are going through in their hearts and minds. Human suffering can have a profound impact on people especially those that have seen that suffering from up close. Never underestimate the power of the human touch or that of the broken spirit, to reach out and touch someone's soul, and stir a response there that is near impossible to stop. Sometimes a moment's perception can result in a lifetime of perspective change. Never give up hope for change. Hopelessness is not a situation, it is an attitude!

The trip itself was a grand success. When the delegation returned to China it was with a resolve to turn things around and mobilize as much support as possible for wide spread awareness programs in South China. The meetings in the Senate were also



very significant. The former minister of health shared with us how the government in Cambodia had made mistakes in the beginning. Though the first case of HIV/AIDS was identified in 1991 in Cambodia, till 1997 the issue was always presumed to be the propaganda of the Condom manufacturing companies to market their products. And then when people started dying in large numbers the government woke up and started taking action.

He gave this final message to the Chinese delegation as he concluded the meeting. “We made the mistake of delaying action and thousands on thousands died. Please don’t make the same mistake in China. You are a very big country and it will devastate you!”

CONCLUSION

I believe transformation is God's will for every one of His creatures. It is we who resist it and try not to be influenced and change. Transformation is also a process, as has already been mentioned. A transformed person is therefore very much a 'work in progress' and may not meet our standards of 'completion'! It is because of this that I embarked on a task of putting these stories together, without a predetermined framework, but by analyzing the stories to see what patterns emerged.

I am enclosing in this book the analysis sheet and follow it with some conclusions that can be drawn from the study of the stories in this volume. When we consider that God is the principle stakeholder in the process of transformation, the change agent automatically becomes a channel who is available to be used in the process as a catalyst. People are very complex beings who are each on their own personal journey. This journey results in progressive crossing of milestones of achievement and understanding. With this come a change in perspective and attitude and a widening of horizons. When people get convinced about something, as a result of experience or of 'seeing', this frames their world view and the way they comprehend their lives and their situation. Sometimes this change is progressive

and therefore hard to recognize. At other times there are major quantum leaps in that change, and it becomes recognizable because the change is dramatic. These are the types of change that I have talked about here, because they have the ability to result in further spontaneous dramatic change. This doesn't in any undermine change that takes place slowly and progressively.

What is it that results in these quantum leaps of change and transformation? From experience, I believe that these are triggered off by something that happened in their situation or were facilitated by someone who sought to proactively bring change in their lives. In analyzing the stories in this volume, I found a pattern emerging. This is by no means a complete list. In the stories in the second volume, I'll probably find there are other triggers too. You might find different triggers in your context.

I encourage you to do your own study and analysis and draw lessons to emulate and sharpen your own skills as a change agent catalyzing transformation. Make a list of the situations in which you sensed there was transformation. Write down the details of what happened in those particular situations, documenting what happened and the sequence of events. (Describe-tape-& transcript: if you are not confident just writing it out)

The chart on the following page will give you an idea of how to do the analysis. The chart has 5 columns with the first one being the title of the story. The second column identifies what the possible trigger was that set off the transformation. The third column identifies whom the transformation took place in. You will notice that it often states this vaguely as 'the Protagonist' and you will need to do a little guessing to see who the real emphasis is on in the story. The last two columns identify what the change agent's role was in the larger transformation process and the final impact of transformation.



(Please see Chart on following page)

Chapter title	Trigger	Transformation	Change agent's role	Transformed person
The truth will always overcome	Attitude change	of the protagonist	Persistent mentoring and challenging attitude	Protagonist and others associated with him
Then you are no use to us	Attitude change	of the protagonist	Challenging perspectives	Protagonist and those under his influence
Tell me in 5 minutes	Convincing	of the protagonist	Persistent convincing	Protagonist and all those under his influence
Use my umbrella	Perspective change	of the protagonist	Persistent convincing	Protagonist and all those under his influence
Ramesh	Deep conviction	of the protagonist	Persistent challenging	Protagonist and all those who came in contact with her
I am not ashamed to beg	Widened horizons	of the protagonist	Demonstrations & sharing one's belief	Protagonist and those under his influence
If I had parents would I beg?	Attitude change	of the protagonist	Challenge of assumptions	Protagonist and all those under his influence
Let me give you my business card	Convincing	of the protagonist	Persistent convincing	Protagonist and all those who were in touch with him
I hate my Father	Persuasive, persistent relationship	of the protagonist	Persistent, unconditional relationship	Protagonist, those in touch with him, and those who heard his story
Tell me what to do...	Widened horizons	of the protagonist	Practical demonstration of a statement	Protagonist and all those under her influence
Share your care	Attitude change	of the Protagonists	Challenge of assumptions	Protagonists and all those that they knew
Lakdi	Persuasive, Persistent, relationship	of the protagonist	Persistent, unconditional relationship	Protagonist and his friends and all those who heard his story

From the analysis on the previous page we see that there are some

Chapter title	Trigger	Transformation	Change agent's role	Transformed person
You and I sit on the same mat	widened horizons	of the protagonist	Persistent care and involvement	Protagonist and all those under his influence and who heard his story
Nikhil	widened horizons	of the people associated with the Protagonist	Persistent care, and involvement	All those associated with the Protagonist
Of course I know World Vision	Timely intervention	of the Protagonist	Immediate Response to and urgent need	Protagonist and all those under his influence
Pe Sokh Huey	Timely intervention	of the protagonist and all who came in contact with her	Persistent love, care, and unconditional involvement	Protagonist and all those who heard her story and that of the change agent's role
Interrupted sermon	Convincing	of the protagonist and all those present	availability and willingness to be a channel	Protagonist and all those present on that occasion
I am not angry with them, but my village	Reality check related attitude change	of the protagonist	Confrontation with stark reality	Protagonist and all those under his influence
no more translators	reality check related attitude change	of the protagonists	Demonstration of reality	Protagonists and all those who are under his influence
Facilitator	persuasive, persistent relationship	of the protagonists	Persistent friendship, counseling, encouragement and prayer	Protagonists and those under their influence
I am in the wrong business	widened horizons	of the protagonist	Confrontation with stark reality	Protagonist and all those who are in touch with him

patterns that determine the trigger that sets off transformation. Let us examine each of these:

- a) *Attitude Change*: This is probably the hardest thing to achieve. Persistent aggravation and lack of change in the status quo can often result in skepticism or Pessimism. I believe this is the single greatest deterrent to transformation. I have often recommended that those in development work must be incurable optimists; otherwise they will lack the necessary

motivation to persist with their efforts. In the stories that fall into this group it was the persistent optimism of the Change agent that enabled transformation to take place. This has to happen based on a relationship that is developed to foster this interaction. Think of a situation in which attitude change resulted in transformation, and you will find that there was a close relationship developed by a change agent to facilitate this happening. If you feel your other work is too important for you to waste time in developing personal relationships, you are not likely to see much transformation in your work!

- b) *Perspective Change*: This happens when someone who was making all their assessments (Often from one's own perspective) begins to look at how others view things. Putting one's self in the 'other's shoes' (as it were) enables a complete change in perspective. This can happen sometimes when one gets reminded of a personal experience or a commitment. The way of viewing things suddenly changes, leaving the person transformed.
- c) *Deep conviction*: Almost always, this happens when there is a deep personal experience as in the 'Ramesh' story. The person's experiences reach down into their psyche and pull at personal chords resulting in a transformation that brings to the forefront a cause or purpose that becomes *as precious as life itself*. Such people become unshakeable in their resolve. More often than not, this type of transformation occurs after some personal tragedy or crisis.
- d) *Widened Horizons*: The transformation that takes place here is a sudden expansion of the 'circle of concern' that extends way beyond the perimeter of the 'earlier perceived boundaries'. With this new expansion comes a greater sense of acceptance and inclusion of people and their needs. I've had this happen to me several times, and the contrast is so

distinct that one can almost measure the change in one's value system over periods of time. Things that were very important (usually personal concerns and 'pet' theories) suddenly don't seem important, while things that were comparatively not so important (usually other's concerns or view points) become very significant. This change is similar to 'perspective change' with the difference that there are several changes taking place simultaneously in many areas.

- e) *Convincing*: This transformation comes from some degree of persistence, and the person being convinced about the particular situation or approach, initially stays resistant to the effort. Then almost like a reversal, when convinced, the person's whole attitude changes. This may be dramatic enough to appear to happen suddenly; where someone may have continued to be indifferent or object to something finds it acceptable. The way to mobilize this is for the change agent to patiently persist, giving examples, demonstrating situations and answering questions.
- f) *Persuasive, Persistent Relationship*: This trigger is similar to the previous one, with the difference that what has to be demonstrated here is less on answering questions and more related to demonstrating sincerity of care. The surprising thing here is often not major acts of Charity, but miniscule gestures of Care that are associated in the mind of the Protagonist as being indicative of the change agent's sincerity.
- g) *Timely intervention*: This often happens in disaster situations, wars or where a person needs urgent or costly medical attention. While the actual intervention itself has a powerful impact by itself, the raising of resources to accomplish it has a wider impact as people start giving beyond what was expected of them; and as resources start coming in from unexpected places. Timely interventions often don't happen spontaneously with a ready provision of resources for the

need at hand. They often require for someone to be willing to intervene in the situation and put themselves 'out on a limb' to get the resources mobilized. Often there is a personal cost involved for doing this, and it often calls for the change agent to be willing to pay the price. This involves being called to 'stand in the gap'.

- h) *Reality check related attitude change*: This happens often in life, when some personal belief gets shattered and reality stares one 'face to face'. Besides the two stories in this book, I can think of many other people whose lives were transformed in situations like this. I recently met a young man called Chhavelith Vathdana who works as a HIV/AIDS community project coordinator with Hope world wide. Chhavelith was waiting for a chance to get a sponsorship for migrating to the US and continuing his studies at University there. While waiting, he decided to volunteer as a care and support team member in an HIV/AIDS project. The people he met and the impact their suffering had on him were so profound, that when his sponsorship finally came through; he found he was not willing to leave! We can all recall such events in our own lives and those we know well.

As those involved with Wholistic development (or Holistic development as some like to call it), there is a tendency to assume that transformation has only taken place when the spiritual dimension is affected. This is not necessarily true, because there are other changes that are precursors to this that might first need to occur in the journey for the person to become Wholistic. This is the reason for which I refer to it as a process, even as a work in progress that continues till all the dimensions of the persons personality get activated- the physical, the Mental, the social and the spiritual. The process doesn't stop there, but continues on even as the person moves from level to level. It is a life long process that

continues till one's death. In the course of life there are gradual transformations and times when there are quantum leaps of transformation which are dramatic and may stand out as recognizable milestones for a person reviewing his or her own life and also for that matter for others looking at that person's life.

I hope after reading all this you feel encouraged to become an agent of transformation, willing to be changed and be a catalyst to facilitate this to happen in the lives of those you have an influence over!

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Glossary of terms used in the book:

GLOSSARY

Term	meaning
ADP	Area Development Program
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<i>Asan</i>	A 'yoga' position where one sits upright with legs folded
<i>Ashram</i>	An institution where people live as one large community
<i>Ashroo</i>	A word in Gujarati that means 'place of shelter and refuge'
BAIF	Bharatiya Agro-Industries Foundation
Bio-gas	A special non-conventional energy device that uses, farm yard manure to covert it into methane for cooking. The resultant residue, called 'slurry' can be used immediately in the field as bio fertilizer
CC	Catholic Charities
CSW	Commercial Sex Worker
DC	Deputy Commissioner - The Administrative head of a District in India who is the head of something like 300 departments
FCPMC	Foreign Capital Project Management Center

Term	meaning
HIV	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
<i>Ji</i>	added to a persons name to show respect in India
KGVK	Krishi Gram Vikas Kendra
<i>Kurta</i>	A long shirt like garment usually worn by men in North India and in Pakistan
LGOP	Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	The Parliament where elected members from the whole of India meet for their deliberations on issues of National importance
<i>Mahatma</i>	A spiritual term, literally meaning 'big spirit'. Given to people who are highly respected in India
NGO	Non-Government Organization
<i>Neta Ji</i>	The term used for 'great leader'
<i>Oraon, Munda, Mahto</i>	Names of different tribes and people groups, predominantly found in South Bihar (now called Jharkand state), India
<i>Pathan</i>	A person from a particular sect of NW undivided India
<i>Pajama</i>	loose pant like garment, usually worn with a 'Kurta'
PSH	Punjab Sweet House
PLWHA	People Living with HIV/AIDS
PLA	Participatory Learning & Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
<i>Shishu Bhavan</i>	a place for abandon children - an orphanage for small children
UMIL	Usha Martin Industries Ltd.,
<i>Veshti</i>	A 'white cloth worn like a 'lungi' - usually in South India
XISS	Xavier Institute of Social Services

