FORLORN but not FORGOTTEN

Caring for children in perilous places
Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have little idea what it’s like to live without conflict. What do they know? Poverty... and the struggle to survive.

World Vision is partnering with the community of Kintanu to help families build a better future. You can join us by saying “yes” to a child in this region and giving him or her the chance to thrive!

Sponsor a child in the DRC’s Kintanu community today!

To find the child who is waiting for you, call 1.866.332.4453 or visit worldvision.org/sponsorCongo
What Brings Us Together

BY RICH STEARNS

He thought the things that separate us are not nearly as big as the things that bring us together. So true, I thought, listening to my wife, Renée, as she spoke to a reporter about He Walks Among Us, the devotional book we co-authored. I thought back to Renée’s first trip with World Vision, when she visited a dump in Guatemala City and struck up a conversation with a young boy. He had been eating yogurt from a cup he found among the trash. You might be thinking that there isn’t much similarity between people who store their food in a refrigerator and those who pull it out of a garbage dump. But Renée looked up and saw the boy’s mother smiling, pleased to see that someone had taken an interest in her family. It was a feeling that any mother could identify with.

Reneé was struck that day by the fact that we aren’t so different after all. We’ve all experienced moments when walls between ourselves and a stranger crumble after we discover a personal connection. This happened to me recently with a Syrian refugee I’ll never forget. Like most Americans, I felt disconnected from and confused by the unfolding crisis in Syria, and the scant media attention hasn’t helped. This happened to me recently with a Syrian refugee I’ll never forget.

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You might remember the outpouring of compassion for victims of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. But as I write, humanitarians have less than half the funding necessary to meet the needs of Syrian refugees.

Yet this disaster dwarfs the Haiti crisis. Roughly 1 million people were affected in Haiti. In Syria, it is estimated that as many as half the country’s population of 22 million is, or soon will be, in need of emergency aid.

Instead of trying to wrap our heads around what it means for 10 million people to be suffering, allow me to take you into the heart and mind of just one girl I met on my visit.

Rich Stearns visits with Haya and other Syrian refugee children in Irbid, Jordan.

Haya is only 10 years old, but already she has seen and suffered more than most girls twice her age. Her father died in the Syrian conflict, and her family fled south to Jordan. Like other Syrian refugees, Haya and her family were middle class. Her father was a businessman. They lived in a nice house and took family vacations. Her mother helped the children with homework. But when I met her, Haya told me that until World Vision came, she didn’t even have a blanket to sleep under, despite the desperately cold nights.

Haya told me her story, and then she sang me a song she wrote just a few days before: “Syria is in pain. Her children were her candles, and they have faded out.” (See the facing page for Haya’s full song.)

When my children were little, I used to tuck them into bed every night. I’d check on them later, and if they had kicked off their blankets, I’d pull them back up to keep them warm. Listening to Haya, I wondered who checks on her during the night if she gets cold. Her story broke my heart. Although language and culture separate us, I felt a father’s protective love for Haya. I remember Haya telling me, “We fear you are forgetting us.” And then she asked, “Have you ever thought of the children of Syria?” We all need to know that someone is thinking about us.

When a loved one or even a stranger shows us that we have not been forgotten, it is a priceless gift. I hope this issue of World Vision magazine reminds you of the power of reaching out to children in heartbreaking circumstances. Caring for a child like Haya is an act both of you might never forget.

“In a complicated crisis, nothing breaks through the mind-numbing statistics and perplexing policy discussions like the voice of a child. When a young person speaks with innocent eloquence about loss, pain, and—Incredibly—hope, the best we can do is listen and let the words sink into our hearts.”

Haya, 10, a Syrian refugee in Jordan, wrote and sang this song to Rich Stearns during his visit to the region:

Syria is in pain.
Syria is bleeding.
Syria is crying for her children.
Her children were her candles, and they have faded out.
Now we are all everywhere outside Syria. We are crying, and Syria is crying blood because her children are missing. Syria misses her people—the children. We, the children, want things to be better again.
We want to get back to our country and rebuild it.
We want to be in our country rebuilding again and again.
We want to be in our country rebuilding again and again.

We want to be in our country rebuilding again and again.

Read more about Syrian refugee children and families on page 12.

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WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Since the middle of the 20th century, recorded disasters have increased tenfold, with the majority stemming from weather. When natural disasters hit, World Vision is already on the ground, equipped to respond quickly with life-saving aid—and prepared to stay for the long term to help families recover.

ONE STORM, THREE NAMES

Hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons are all the same weather phenomenon, named differently depending on where the storm develops.

RECENT NATURAL DISASTERS

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<th>FLOODING</th>
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<td>India, Philippines, Indonesia, U.S., Mexico, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar</td>
<td>India, Vietnam, Philippines</td>
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TYPHOON HAIYAN RAVAGES THE PHILIPPINES

Typhoon Haiyan, the most powerful storm to make landfall last year, hit the Philippines on Nov. 8. Cutting a swath of destruction through the island nation, Haiyan affected 14 million people, including 5.5 million children.

World Vision launched an emergency response to provide relief aid to 456,000 people hardest hit by the deadly storm. Distributions of food, hygiene kits, and nonfood items helped thousands in the first week after Haiyan hit, and a week later, World Vision launched its first of 40 planned Child-Friendly Spaces for Typhoon Haiyan survivors in Tabugon, northern Cebu. At least 400 children played and took part in activities in tent spaces set up on the grounds of a badly damaged elementary school.

World Vision has worked with the people of the Philippines since 1954, and is often one of the first organizations to respond when disaster strikes, including a magnitude-7.2 earthquake that rocked the same area just a month before the typhoon. World Vision provides emergency relief supplies to the most vulnerable in the immediate aftermath of a disaster like Haiyan—and builds on the initial response with long-term recovery and rebuilding plans.

WORLD VISION’S RESPONSE TO TYPHOON HAIYAN

14 MILLION people affected
5.5 MILLION children affected
468,000 people World Vision has reached with shelter, food, clean water, or nonfood items
20 World Vision development program areas affected
40,000 sponsored children affected
40 Child-Friendly Spaces World Vision plans to create for 18,400 kids affected by the storm
55 years World Vision has worked in the Philippines

FOR COMPLETE COVERAGE of Typhoon Haiyan—including stories about sponsored children and recovery efforts, photo slideshows, and videos—visit wvmag.org/typhoon.

ONE STORM, THREE NAMES

Hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons are all the same weather phenomenon, named differently depending on where the storm develops.

WORLD VISION’S RESPONSE TO TYPHOON HAIYAN
A dream inspires a retired carpenter to cycle across America for water.

One night, in the summer of 2012, Greg Hansen awoke with a crazy idea. “What do you think about cycling across the country for clean water?” he asked his wife, Sue. The couple had recently finished studying The Hole in Our Gospel by World Vision U.S. President Rich Stearns. Greg was floored when he read the statistic that among the children who die each day because they lack access to clean water. “Sue and I have eight children,” Greg says. “Children have always been an incredible part of our life. That is at the forefront of what has touched my heart: the clean water.”

For seven weeks, the cyclists traversed 30 to 40 miles a day. Between Coronado, Calif., and Staten Island, Greg and Dennis faced a multitude of challenges—from pneumonia and dehydration to equipment breakdowns. Despite setbacks, a handful of incidents that seemed divinely orchestrated made the team realize that a special story was unfolding. In the middle of New Mexico, they met a water truck driver who gave them four cases of bottled water for the journey. Then, after a long day in Virginia, the team had no place to stay—until they encountered a local missionary who had been a bike mechanic. He provided them with lodging and bicycle tuneups. “Each morning we prayed together. I believe that brought us through,” says Greg. “Ed says there’s power in the team’s willingness to step out to follow Jesus.”

To date, Greg has raised more than $110,000. Beyond galvanizing the church community, the journey inspired Greg’s rock star brother-in-law, Keith Richards, to give $50,000 to the cause. “My hope is that people will look at this and ask, ‘What about me—what’s my vision?’” —Chris Huber

BE INSPIRED LIKE GREG.

Look for an updated version of Rich Stearns’ The Hole in Our Gospel in May.

As funds mounted for the cause, Greg, Sue, and Sue’s brother, Dennis Moore, began to plan their cross-country cycling tour to raise more money for Kenya water projects. With Sue and their church providing vehicle and logistics support, Greg and Dennis hit the road on April 1, 2013. Their church, Salem Church on Staten Island, supported the team as it progressed mile after mile. Pastor Ed Cole says, “As soon as [Greg] shared it with me, I thought, ‘This is a fantastic thing for the whole church to get on. God put something on his heart, and he said yes.’”

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“What’s more, putting Greg’s “crazy idea” into action has been a great example,” says Ed. “My hope is that people will look at this and ask, ‘What about me—what’s my vision?’”

“TIPS FOR WRITING TO YOUR SPONSORED CHILD”

Be inspired by Marilee at wvmag.org/godspace. Read Kay’s story on page 10.
Deep in the slums of New Delhi, in a gray and dusty landscape of crowded, weathered apartments, hope seemed far off for Maya. The 9-year-old suffered seizures—her limbs stiffened and her mouth foamed as her mother looked on helplessly. After a few episodes at school, Maya was told to stay home.  

Maya feared the seizures. Her father, a laborer, scraped up money for medicine and even a witch doctor. Nothing worked. Then one day, hope arrived in the form of a letter from 7,000 miles away. Nothing to do,” Maya says. “My head was heavy all the time.”

“I used to sit around, and there was nothing to do,” Maya says. “My head was heavy all the time.”

Then one day, hope arrived in the form of a letter from 7,000 miles away. From that day on, Maya’s life included a smile, a school and thriving. She regularly gets affirmation and encouragement. Maya held onto Kay’s letters like a lifeline. From the stoop of her apartment in the slum, she read from one: “I just received your beautiful letter. Thank you very much for the [bracelets]. They are beautiful, and I will treasure them forever. ... I pray for you, your brothers, and your mother and father every day. Keep smiling every day, Maya. You have a wonderful smile that makes me very happy.”

As she read the letter again, Maya began to weep. Those simple words changed her life. “The prayers of my sponsor have healed me,” Maya says. “Kay said, ‘Don’t fear. Count on God, and everything will be okay.’ I listened to Kay.”

That was about three years ago. Today, Maya has emerged from her shell. She is back in school and thriving. She regularly joins other children at World Vision’s after-school center. The formerly fearful girl is now writing, studying, and learning to care for herself. She even speaks at World Vision youth events.

“I was very much encouraged,” says Kay Yoke, Maya’s sponsor. “She’s part of our family,” Kay says. “My whole family knows who Maya is.”

——Phil Manzano

WORLD VISION ON WHEELS

World Vision is on the road, crisscrossing the nation to bring essential school tools and lively learning opportunities to U.S. communities from coast to coast.

Journey to Tanzania

Housed in a semitruck, the World Vision Experience: Kisoro Trek brings to life the trials and hopes of a Maasai community in Tanzania through a simulated bus journey on an off-road adventure to Kisoro, near Mt. Kilimanjaro. A World Vision team in Tanzania outfitted cameras on the front, rear, and sides of a vehicle to provide a 360-degree viewing experience, and the vehicle traversed the actual route to Kisoro. Exhibit visitors meet Babayetu, a 13-year-old World Vision sponsored child, who serves as the guide. The Kisoro Trek experience demonstrates the real impact of sponsorship in a community—improved education for children, access to clean water, and healthcare.

equipping educators

World Vision’s mobile Teacher Resource Centers are packed with classroom supplies for U.S. teachers in schools serving low-income neighborhoods and communities recovering from disasters. To help struggling schools and teachers, World Vision restocked their classrooms following disasters like Hurricane Sandy and the tornadoes that hit Moore, Okla., last year. Teacher Resource Centers pull into recovering communities and distribute free educational resources to teachers—everything from pencils and paper for students to books and learning materials for teachers.

READ MORE about World Vision’s work in India’s slums on page 27, and sponsor a child using the envelope between pages 16 and 17, or go to wvmag.org/sponsor.
Of the 8 million people displaced by Syria’s war, more than half are children. Many arrive in neighboring countries with little more than the clothes on their backs and memories of friends and home. Here in Jordan, they take refuge with their families in a crowded camp or suffocating accommodations, mourning lost loved ones and yearning for their former lives.

Each child has a story.

CRYING for THEIR COUNTRY

Sedra, 7, her parents, and her six siblings, ages 1 to 11, feared for their lives as they fled their war-torn nation, running away with only the clothes on their backs as they headed to the Jordanian border. They now live in Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan.
A Syrian family receives a tent at Za’atari Refugee Camp, where at least 120,000 people are registered. Za’atari is the second-largest refugee camp in the world and the fourth-largest population center in Jordan. Chain-link fences, some topped with razor wire, protect the mobile units belonging to international aid agencies and food distribution sites. Routine food shortages in the camp have prompted demonstrations.

Mohaned, 3, was holding his father’s hand when gunmen opened fire, instantly killing his dad. Mohaned rarely speaks and refuses to leave his aunt’s side. World Vision has programs to provide counseling for children.

Nura, 25, escaped war with her three children. “We were sitting down for our holiday meal, and I heard the noise, one that I have never heard before: a whooshing, a howl, a whistle. Then, everything I ever knew and had—all of it was gone,” she says. The family now lives in a tiny basement in Zarqa—10 people sharing a space no larger than a storage shed. Nura says, “We are among the invisible.”

With nowhere to go and nothing to do, Syrian refugee children and siblings, Adel, 5 (right), Semer, 2 (center), and Islam, 1, are thin and lethargic. They spend their days on a cot inside a dilapidated basement room in Jordan. Their mother, Nura, (seen in photo on facing page), worries for their health.

Once, Israa thought her life mattered. On the day of her final exam, warring parties destroyed her school in Syria, shattering her dreams of earning a high-school diploma. The 18-year-old remembers glass flying everywhere, hitting students in the face. As many as 4,000 Syrian schools have been attacked or destroyed. The honor student now spends her time confined to a tiny flat with at least 10 others in an impoverished section of Zarqa. She says, “I want to return to Syria, my Syria, a Syria free of war.”
After an afternoon of reading, writing, and math, scores of children head back to their families in Irbid, where World Vision funds a remedial school for 200 Syrian and Jordanian children. The organization also pays for transportation. For the children, the nearly two-hour class, offered three times a week, is the bright spot in their lives. Children often show up even on days when there are no classes.

Children in World Vision’s remedial class in Irbid have reason to smile: Notes tucked inside their new backpacks from the U.S. tell them they’re cherished. One note from Timothy of Las Vegas reads: “Enjoy, and remember you are important.”

This Syrian refugee child was able to get a prescription and new eyeglasses while enrolled at World Vision’s remedial school in Irbid. Children at the school also are given a meal—savory pies with cheese and herbs and a drink—before they are released for the day. Children are often seen taking one of the two pies home to share with their family.

Certified teachers at the remedial school instruct children in math, English, and Arabic. Here, a boy learns basic Arabic words and numbers. Most Syrian refugee children have missed so much school that catching up has proved difficult. “We try to help them any way we can to give them confidence to learn,” says Sawsar Othman, who teaches English.

WORLD VISION RESPONDS
To meet the increasing needs of war-affected children and families, World Vision is scaling up programs in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Work will include:

» Remedial education classes for children
» Child-Friendly Spaces, providing children with a safe place to play, learn, and recover from emotional scars
» Psychosocial counseling for parents and children
» Distributions of food vouchers, basic hygiene kits, and clean water for families
» Winterization assistance—providing families with stoves, fuel, and shelter improvement

PRAY
… for each of these children by name.
… for peace in Syria.
… for continued funding and growing generosity for international relief efforts.

READ MORE ABOUT WORLD VISION’S RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS AT WVMAG.ORG/SYRIA.
In Bangladesh, World Vision provides a refuge for children trapped with their mothers in the sex-trade environment—and weaves a safety net against child trafficking.

CHILDREN of the BROTHEL
Tumpa doesn’t know who her father is. She was just seven months along in her mother’s womb when he slithered out of her life. Tumpa’s mother is a prostitute. Her father was a client. He made promises to Tumpa’s mother that he didn’t keep. Now the 3-year-old lives with her mother in a bustling brothel in Jessore, Bangladesh.

A child’s life in a brothel is unimaginable. Tumpa and her mother live with a madam in a giant cement condominium with rooms for sleeping and rooms for sex—sometimes one room serving both purposes. In this place, dozens of women sleep, wake, eat, and conduct soul-scarring business with a steady stream of men as their children look on.

In the open communal space, where brothel workers primp for the next client or consume a hurried lunch of rice and vegetables, Tumpa and the other children fight boredom amid the squalor, playing near stoves leaping with flames, crawling on floors dirty with cigarette butts and empty potato chip wrappers, maybe tossing a rubber ball until a madam screams at them to stop.

The brothel is on Hat Khola Street. In Bengali, hat khola means “the marketplace,” and the street is a vast marketplace indeed. You can buy everything—balls, sugar, tea, biscuits, clothing, screwdrivers, pliers, door hinges, nails. And at the brothel, you can buy people, like Tumpa’s mother. But just across Hat Khola Street, there is a heavenly respite. World Vision runs a Child-Friendly Space staffed by Dipshikha Roy, 35. When Tumpa’s mother, Moyna, brings her over each day, the little girl crawls right into Dipshikha’s arms. “Tumpa is so happy here,” Moyna says. “She can play with the other girls.”

Dipshikha begins each day by making sure the children’s uniforms are correctly buttoned, shirts properly tucked, and shoes firmly tied. “We start our session by singing the national anthem,” which the children perform with unbridled joy, Dipshikha says. “How are your moms?” she asks the children gathered around her in a circle. “Oh, they are still in bed,” says one little boy.

Sojib, whose mother, Jolly, works at the brothel, arrives. “Have you had breakfast? Did you brush your teeth?” Dipshikha asks him. She carefully buttons his orange shirt and helps him climb into his blue shorts, gently smoothing his black hair. Tumpa, who arrived early, stumbles into a table and begins to cry. Dipshikha reaches out to provide instant comfort.

There is constant activity in the Child-Friendly Space, alive with color, sound, and life. “First we count, then we learn letters,” says Dipshikha. “We teach about fruits and vegetables. We’re now learning to count from 1 to 20.”

After the children’s hot lunch, they are supposed to rest. “It’s actually not rest, it’s running,” she says, laughing. Every evening, the children return to the brothel and Dipshikha goes home to her daughter, Chitra, 8. Dipshikha’s husband, Binoy, died five years ago, she says, of a hole in his heart. In a sense, Dipshikha now has a hole in her heart as well. “I miss him,” she says.

Chitra, as well as the nine boys and three girls at the Child-Friendly Space, help fill that hole.

Loving Society’s Rejects

Dipshikha is a friend to the women who work at the brothel, such as Tumpa’s mother, Moyna. “I am happy because World Vision keeps my child all day,” Moyna says. “Dipshikha is a wonderful lady. She treats these children like they are her own.”

Moyna, 30, has been at the brothel for five years. She is from Barisal, east of Jessore on the wide Bangladesh delta plain. She was tricked by a friend into joining the brothel—a common occurrence. “[My friend] had a job for me, a housecleaning job. I would be able to send money home,” Moyna says, closing her eyes as she speaks.
teal-painted eyelids for a moment. “She brought me to the brothel and said, ‘You stay here.’ My friend never came back. I never got a housecleaning job.”

Moyna hates being a sex worker and dreams of becoming a cook. “If I can get a source where I can make money, then I would like to leave this place,” she says. “I want a different life.” Gazing out the window at a raucous event with loud horns playing—Moyna says she will never marry.

“The workers think they have no future. They don’t think they have a chance. But their children have a future,” says Provash Chandra Biswas, 48, the director for World Vision’s Bangladesh Child Protection Program. A trained attorney, Provash has been with World Vision for two decades, working with those whom society has rejected.

Provash says the madams of the brothel are extremely powerful and that they target the children. “The madam who is running the business, [her] target is the girl child,” he says. “Most of the sex workers, they do not want to bring their children into the profession. But sometimes they have to do that because there are no opportunities.”

It all becomes more frightful at night, says Provash. “You see a lot of criminals. They plan crimes in the brothel. Smugglers also use the brothels.”

Sex workers become prisoners. “If they come out, they face stigma,” says Provash. “What options do they have?” When Provash visits the brothel to check on the sex workers, he pays keen attention to the children. “They see everything,” he says. “Sometimes they sleep under the beds. The rooms are very small. My observation: Most of the children of sex workers are different than normal children. They have stress.”

**Protecting the Vulnerable**

Child-Friendly Spaces are part of a comprehensive plan World Vision has implemented in Bangladesh to prevent child trafficking, protect those who might be harmed, and restore those who have suffered. The plan focuses on awareness, advocacy and networking, victim support, and income-generating activities.

World Vision staff meet monthly in Jessore with community members to ensure they are monitoring children. Child protection “point people” are trained to report missing children immediately—setting in motion an Amber Alert-type response.

Staff members work on the border between India and Bangladesh to plug the holes through which people are trafficked, educating law enforcement officers and journalists to recognize what trafficking looks like and to tell the story.

Representatives from World Vision sit on committees at the highest levels of government and engage with the media, developing dramas for television about trafficking.

Through partner organizations, World Vision supports victims with medicine, clothing, testing for disease, and counseling.

And staff train and equip vulnerable families in income-generating activities, such as sewing and raising poultry. Increasing a family’s income lessens the likelihood that the children will be sold.

“In 19 years with World Vision, this is my hardest job,” says Provash. “We do not have any weekends. We do not have any holidays. This is a great challenge for us.”

But it’s a worthwhile challenge for this team of dedicated servants—fighting to stop trafficking, helping restore victims, and protecting children like Tumpa by creating safe, joyful spaces where they can play, learn, and be loved.

*Last names of women and children in the brothel withheld to protect privacy.*

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**THE BIG PICTURE**

More than 36,600 children in Bangladesh receive support from U.S. sponsors. In addition, child protection programs through World Vision’s Campaign For Every Child aim to reach more than 2.6 million people in seven countries, including Bangladesh. For more information about For Every Child, go to worldvision.org/ForEveryChild.

**PRAY**

… for women trapped in the sex trade.

… for children, especially girls, vulnerable to exploitation.

… for the tireless, exhausting work of World Vision staff in Bangladesh.
THE NORTHWESTERN CORNER of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a forgotten land on the road to nowhere. Overshadowed by ongoing conflicts to the east and controversial mining to the south, this isolated region seldom makes the news.

Gemena, the area’s largest city, has no paved roads, running water, electricity, banks, or post offices. Poor sanitation fuels disease; one child in 10 dies before reaching age 5. Only one-tenth of the population has access to clean water.

In a desperate attempt to survive, isolated families flock to Gemena, only to realize there are no jobs, economic opportunities, or agricultural land. They build temporary mud huts on parcels they hope no one else will claim and scavenge for temporary labor that pays 50 cents a day.

Parents wake up early to beat thieves to the family’s precious crops, grown on rented land. They pick whatever meager fruits and vegetables have ripened—often the only morsels separating them from starvation.

Too often, grieving families can be seen carrying tiny caskets to an overcrowded graveyard. Tragically, most of these deaths could have been prevented.

Yet through the prayers and sacrificial giving of a growing group of U.S. child sponsors, these families are daring to believe that a miracle is possible. Ledia, the new sponsorship program in Gemena, means “A new thing is coming to the village.” And it is.

Parents share their excitement as they see improvement in their children’s health through water and sanitation programs. Already accomplished in World Vision’s first year: three schools and two maternity centers are serving children and their families—erected and equipped with plenty of help from community members.

Trained community volunteers also visit sponsored children’s families to ensure they have the basic resources they need and to remind parents about upcoming trainings.

Grandmother Elise Zembe is among those learning how to ensure her grandchildren have good food to eat.

“There have been many days when we didn’t have enough food for our grandchildren,” Elise says. “But I learned how to feed them the right types of food, and they don’t get sick as often. Now, with even a few peanuts or beans, look at how much energy they have.”

Another grandmother, Zelekumbi Zembi, recently watched as her grandson, Muke, masterfully rolled a bicycle rim around their dirt yard. Her face broke into a broad smile.

“My dream for my children is that they follow God and that they have a better life than we have been able to give them,” she says. “With the World Vision program, they will not suffer in poverty.”

Thanks to the generosity of faithful child sponsors, the miracle is materializing.

—Jeff Brown,
World Vision senior adviser based in the United States
FOR ONE SINGLE mother and her five children in Haiti, sponsors have made a big difference. Jean Menela, 28, formerly lived with her children in a rickety hut built of plastic, branches, and metal sheets. Like many Haitian women, Jean learned the hard way that dropping out of school often leads to early motherhood and limited prospects, especially when the children’s father runs away. She regularly reminds her three daughters that their priority is education. “If they don’t prevent themselves getting involved with boys, they end up in my situation,” she says.

Her resolve grew out of World Vision’s emphasis on the importance of education for children. These messages became especially important after 2010. “Post-earthquake Haiti has been challenged with a new set of problems with a high percentage of children who are not going to school,” says Valerie Noisette, head of education for World Vision. “If we don’t focus on educating young people, we will not see any change in Haiti.”

Child sponsorship allows Jean’s four school-age children to study. Caroline, 10, and Wifmy, 11, both want to become teachers. Their sister, 14-year-old Lovenie, says, “I want to live in a beautiful country where all children can go to school.” Thanks to child sponsorship, Jean and her children have a new home—one that doesn’t roast in the sun and flood in the rain. Jean calls the gift “a miracle.”

Jean also participates in a mothers club, where she learns about health, hygiene, and nutrition. “We talk about how we can support each other and make sure our children stay in school,” Jean says. “And how, if they don’t, this is a failure not just for themselves, but for our community and for our country.”

Just a few years ago, less than half of Haiti’s elementary-age students were in the classroom. Today, elementary school attendance has climbed to 77 percent as communities embrace education for children—with mothers like Jean leading the way. —Michelle Rice, World Vision communicator formerly based in Haiti

HAITI

RISING FROM THE RUBBLE

AS DAWN BREAKS over a New Delhi resettlement colony, Gulabi is already off to the wholesale market. She jumps in a minivan for the 7-mile journey, determined to arrive early, so she can pick the best vegetables and fruit. Selling produce used to be her husband’s job, but no longer.

Life is seldom easy—or fair—in India’s teeming slums, where the family lived earlier. A few years ago, Gulabi, her husband, Chabilal Shah, and their three children were forced out of the shack they called home—displaced along with their entire “slum settlement.”

“Life had its challenges, but I could face them all because I had my husband by my side,” says this once-timid homemaker, who uses no last name. Moving to a new resettlement colony, Chabilal invested all the family’s savings in a piece of land, and they were starting to pick up the pieces when he was diagnosed with jaundice. Despite spending every penny on medical treatment, Chabilal died.

“Our world came crumbling down,” says 17-year-old Pinki, the oldest child. “We were reduced to nothing.” Gulabi was in no position to replace her husband as breadwinner. “I used to beg and plead for 60 rupees [$1] just to sustain ourselves,” she recalls. “No one around us cared. As a mother, I was upset that I was unable to provide basic meals for my children.”

When life looked grim and hopeless, World Vision heard about their need and provided a vegetable cart so Gulabi could earn an income. Along with constructing a brick house for the family, World Vision enrolled Pinki’s two brothers in sponsorship. Now the boys are thriving in school. Amit, 12, says, “Studies are good, and when I grow up, I want to be a teacher.”

“‘We were left all alone. We had no one,’” Gulabi says. “‘But now we have World Vision. It feels good to have someone care for us.’”

—Annila Harris, World Vision communicator based in India

INDIA

SUNRISE OVER THE SLUMS

With a literacy rate of 49 percent, almost half of Haitians are illiterate. 570 children in Haiti need sponsors.

PRAY Thank God that Jean’s children now attend school, and pray that every child in Haiti may have access to education.

More than 80 percent of Indians live on less than $1 per day. 7,253 children in India need sponsors.

PRAY Ask God that more families like Gulabi’s will partner with World Vision so they can be cared for and build a stronger future.
n the late 1970s and early 1980s, José Santiago Avelar’s family was swept up in a tide of hardships, due largely to El Salvador’s military dictatorship. Through the decades that followed, 44-year-old José discovered a new path to freedom that no form of oppression can derail.

His journey started humbly. The eldest of four children in a poor family, José’s parents wanted the best for him. In 1978, they made a decision that would change his life.

“Remembering the thrill of writing to his American sponsor.

“I remember that once I made a drawing for him of the cartoon Paw Wow. I don’t think I did it very pretty, but I drew it with love,” he says.

World Vision’s educational support “pushed me to move forward more and more. The most important thing was to know that someone behind me was interested in making my dreams come true,” says José.

In 1988, José pursued those dreams by moving to Guatemala to study teaching at an Adventist training institute. He graduated as a primary school teacher in 1991 and went to Costa Rica to earn his bachelor’s degree in theology.

Returning to El Salvador, José married Elizabeth, who was also sponsored through World Vision as a child.

Since then, José has served as a pastor in several churches and prison ministries, and was a principal at a Christian school. Now, he is president of an Adventist association that supports 140 churches. José is the first and only professional in his family.

Despite losing two of his siblings during El Salvador’s civil war, José moves forward with a positive attitude. He sings the praises of sponsorship’s effectiveness.

“I would like to bring together all of my community’s past and current sponsored children to show the world that sponsorship works! We all need an inspiration in life, and being sponsored was mine,” he says. “Do not be afraid to invest. The best investment a human being can make is to invest in another human being.”

The assurance that sponsorship supports provides taught José that God was giving him the opportunity to be whoever he wanted to be. He says, “Do not abandon your desires; God is giving you the victory.”

José is passing down his faith to the church, and to society.

“Am proud of my children,” says José. “Our dream is for them to be useful to God, to the church, and to society.

“If you want to touch the heart of God, there is only one way: by helping others,” says José. “Remember that God gave us his greatest offer of love—the greatest giver is our Father.”

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WAS TO KNOW THAT SOMEONE BEHIND ME WAS INTERESTED IN MAKING MY DREAMS COME TRUE.”

—José Avelar
The dressing room buzzes with energy as girls from the Children of the Blue Sky choir fix their makeup and adjust their costumes before taking the stage at Mongolia’s annual Vision Star Festival. Since 2001, this World Vision event has brought together talented youth from across Mongolia to perform. Many of the boys and girls who participate in Vision Star come from impoverished households in both rural and urban areas of Mongolia. Practicing, rehearsing, and finally performing before an audience boosts self-confidence, helps the children discover and develop their talents, and instills a sense of empowerment that lasts long after the spotlight fades.

The very nature of the kingdom of God is paradoxical, running counter to popular opinion. Paradoxes are the polar opposite of the way we think, and the Bible is filled with examples:

To find our life, we must lose it. There is strength in weakness. We die so that we might live. The rich are poor, and the poor are rich. Power and influence don’t reside in the center, but in the margins.

But do we live these truths? One man did, and his name was Bob Pierce, World Vision’s founder. Bob believed that the kingdom of God could be advanced through the smallest, weakest, and most vulnerable among us. He saw, through kingdom eyes, the potential of orphaned children to transform the world.

I know from personal experience just how transformational a relationship with the so-called “weak” can be. For the last seven years, I have been “sponsor Dad” to Caroline in Kenya. This experience has taught me so much. I thought I was supposed to bless her. Turns out, what has come back to me has been exponentially more than I have given. I get so much joy in reading her letters and watching her grow. I’m deeply touched every time she dares to confide in me her hopes and dreams. But without a doubt, the single greatest consolation I have is in knowing that Caroline prays for me. Undoubtedly, my life is blessed because she has blessed me to God.

So when I was asked to run a marathon that would benefit her and her community, there was no question what I would do. The thought of Caroline has kept me motivated through long runs, sore muscles, and the impulse to give up. I don’t particularly enjoy running—especially not 26.2 miles. But I run for love of Caroline. Caroline lives in southwest Kenya, in the nation’s poorest province. Her community has battled malaria, HIV, dysentery, and more for years. Even though disease and death are commonplace, every time I have looked into her eyes, I see hope.

In light of this, I confess that as tremendous as it feels to complete a marathon and receive a finisher’s medal, nothing compares with the deep sense of soul satisfaction I felt when I gave those medals to my Caroline. She deserved them much more than I did because even though I ran, she won.

While society applauds the winners, God remembers the “also-rans.” The “last” and the “least” have a special place in the heart of God, and that is first place.

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I run because, in her part of the world, water is neither abundant nor pure. It seems unimaginable, but people today are still dying from lack of clean drinking water. Caroline’s community is awash in desperate poverty. Apart from the intervention of others, hope of a better tomorrow remains just that: a hope, not a reality. I run to make her hope a lasting reality. Jesus once said, “The last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16).

In the paradox that is the kingdom of God, first and last as we know them are reversed. Those we assume are at the head of the line are actually closer to the end, and those we place last are really first.

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So this little girl in a forgotten village tucked on the backside of nowhere is the real winner. She is of first importance to God. The question is, do we live in such a way that Caroline and her many brothers and sisters around the world get first place with us? 

Pastor Keith Stewart is senior pastor at Springcreek Church in Garland, Texas, and a passionate advocate for the world’s most vulnerable people.

I Ran, She Won

By Pastor Keith Stewart

Pastor Keith Stewart runs a marathon for Caroline, his sponsored child.

“The last will be first, and the first will be last.”
—Matthew 20:16

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