

Fall/Winter

2006-2007

**Agape**  
International

LOVE IN ACTION

## WHAT'S NEW

### A Trip to India

As many of you know, I (Kim) visited India and our Agape homes for the first time in October. (An earlier scheduled visit was postponed when I learned I was pregnant with Hope, who turned two in January). I shared my "Top Ten Things I Learned (or Confirmed) While in India" at our fall dinner, but thought that those of you unable to attend might also appreciate the trip update.

**India is very poor.** This may seem like a "duh" observation, but I think some may no longer think of India as very poor. What we see/hear about India is strong economic growth, increased outsourcing and many of us know and interact with talented, well educated colleagues from India. The real story though is that India's economic growth has not yet changed the lives of most – 300 million still make less than a \$1 a day, the average annual income is less than \$500 and more than 40% of the population is still illiterate.

We visited a slum in India to do an Agape medical clinic. (Without these medical clinics, those in the slums would receive no medical care. Sadly, many are suffering from easily treated and cured illnesses.) I've traveled to many places, but I'd never seen poverty like what I saw in this slum. More than three hundred families live on a tiny patch of urban dirt, in huts made of garbage, with no running water.

The slum we visited near the city of Hyderabad. Agape provides the only medical care these families receive.





# AGAPE FAMILY cont.

**India is filled with beautiful people – outside and inside.**

And yet, here in the slums and wherever we went, the people were beautiful. They crowded around us and welcomed us with smiling faces. The children ran and brought back their baby brothers and sisters, showing them off proudly. They laughed and they played – their warmth was contagious.

**Children don't lose hope easily.**

These slum kids, and the Agape children even more so, reminded me that children don't lose hope easily. These children have experienced incomprehensible tragedy in their short lives, and yet, they are still kids...



Just a few of the many beautiful children in the slums.

**...and it doesn't take much to make Indian children smile.**

Our first day in the orphanages, we brought beads to make bead bracelets. We worried that the older kids and in particular, the boys would not be interested. ALL of the kids were thrilled. They were so proud of what they made. We made sock puppets another day and the kids were ecstatic, even when the eyes and hair we'd so carefully glued on was falling off within the hour. Several days later, the kids still had their sock puppets on – even though they were mostly all sock by that point. One of the things that touched me the most was the way they watched out for each other – bringing a friend's bead bracelet to be tied first, or helping another with their sock puppet hair before doing their own. We gave a simple present to each child at the end – hair barrettes to the girls and plastic watches to the boys. Even though they were all different, we never heard "I want what he/she has." They were happy with whatever they received.



A young mother in the slum is delighted to have Lynne hold her child (the tiny boy is three years old and has a treatable eye condition).



Laxmi and Madevi, HIV positive, with their hand puppets.



# AGAPE FAMILY cont.

**Small dollars make a huge difference in quality of life.** I was able to see exactly what a \$15,000 annual budget orphanage (45 kids) looks like. It's not luxurious, but the children are well cared for. I was again reminded of how much we can do with so little money in India.

**I will never drive in India.** O.K. – this was the attempted comic relief in my presentation. Seriously, there are no stop signs and no apparent rules on the roads. Lynne pointed out traffic lights but everyone merrily drove through the red lights and if someone had attempted to actually stop, it would have caused an accident.

**Shaking your head means “yes”, not “no”.** More cultural surprises! The staff and the kids “bob” their head gently back and forth to indicate agreement. In my first meeting with Lynne and her new husband Ratnam, he did this quite a lot after I spoke and I thought “this man does not agree with anything I say!” (just like my own husband?)

**I've still got it when it comes to clapping games.** The Agape kids have very few toys and so they've learned to entertain themselves. They delight in clapping games – especially when they are playing with an adult. I had some serious performance anxiety early in the trip because I didn't quickly pick up their games, much less remember new games to teach them (like my traveling companions did). Luckily, I got it together because we played a lot of clapping games...

**Miracles happen.** Currently, a third of our kids are HIV positive themselves (all have been orphaned by AIDS). The best statistics we have suggest that if a child is born HIV positive in the US, even with drugs and good nutrition, life expectancy is age 11. AIDS in children who have never developed any immunity is a very different disease than adult AIDS. Most of our children come to us in very bad shape; they have not had the benefit of good nutrition or the right drugs. Realistically, we can expect to lose most if not all of our HIV positive children and we have lost five children already. And yet, very few of these kids look sick. Many that we thought would not live a month after coming to us are thriving. Perhaps even more important than their physical health, they are happy, despite all they've endured.

**We are all so blessed – and we need to take care of each other.** It would be hard to walk away from a trip like this without an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what I/we have – a home, healthy children, enough to eat – the list is long. It is so easy in the culture of America to feel like we don't have enough. And yet, we are all rich by the world's standards. The US is 6% of the world's population but we consume 40% of the world's resources. 92% of the world doesn't own a car. One billion people don't have clean water; 800 million won't eat today. The UN estimates that \$20 billion would provide the world with clean water, nutrition and basic health – the US spends this annually on ice cream. I left India with a renewed commitment to help – and we all have the means to make a meaningful difference in the lives of these children or the many like them!



Shankar, who came to us last year near death, shows off his painted hand (we made a wall and wall hanging with hand prints of all the HIV positive children).



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# GET INVOLVED



Right: Agape volunteers and fellow India travelers (from left to right) Susan Norcross, Nancy Roy, Kim Ogden and Claudia Vanderpool. Agape Administrator, Rajeswari, in the center.

As always, there are lots of ways to get involved with Agape. You don't have to travel to India to help... Won't you consider:

- Organizing clothing/toy collection in your neighborhood?
- Helping Kim send out newsletters and other communications?
- Organizing a fundraiser for your family and friends?
- Sending a letter to family and friends letting them know about Agape?
- Donating generously?
- Praying for our kids?

All of these contributions mean so much to the kids and to us!

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