

Commentary... What every girl wants

By David Purviance
Executive Director World's Children

After spending almost a month in India I now know something I never knew before: I know what every Indian girl wants.

Along with World's Children Operations Director Andy Gillihan, I visited 23 orphanages in 26 days — all of them children's homes supported by World's Children sponsors. The purpose of our visit was to examine projects done at each home over the past five years and determine how effective the projects were in improving the lives of the children. Our charity had paid for borewells, water filters, beds and mattresses, mosquito nets, new toilets, kitchens and dormitories, cows and chickens for better nutrition, and many other projects. Also, important information was exchanged with the administrators of each home as we sat and discussed their needs and our requirements for continued funding.

But the best part of every visit was the time spent with the children. Thanks to a generous donation from Sisters resident Victoria Boucher, we were able to take a large suitcase filled with toys for the kids: jump ropes, jacks, spinners, and other playthings. Who knew this 73-year-old man could still squat on the floor and play jacks, or cut a few Bollywood dance moves with the girls? This may surprise you, but an orphanage can be a really happy place. It all depends on the love given by the administrators. The (mostly) Catholic nuns that run the orphanages we visited are true saints, and you see it reflected in the faces of the children they care for.

The most rewarding part of each visit was just talking

with the kids. Most of the orphanages were for girls, because in India sons are preferred over daughters, and as a result many girls are not wanted by their families and are abandoned to grow up in an orphanage. Every time I talked with the girls I asked them what kind of a man they wanted to marry someday. I would give four choices and ask them to tell me which type of man they hoped to marry.

Option one was a very rich man, able to buy you anything you want: fancy sarees, a nice car, a beautiful home. I knew this had to be tempting to the girls because they all came from abject poverty.

The second option was to marry a very handsome man. Someone so handsome that all the women in your village will whisper how lucky you are. Would you want to marry someone who looks like Mahesh Babu (a Bollywood movie heartthrob)? The mention of his name drew giggles and blushes from all the girls. Also a tempting choice.

Or maybe you would like to marry a very strong man, who could protect you from any danger. Even a tiger could not harm you when your muscular husband was with you.

And finally I would ask if they wanted to marry a kind man. Someone who never beats you and tells you he loves you and tenderly cares for your children.

Then I would ask for a show of hands for each choice. I might get one or two hands for a rich or handsome husband. Usually, none for a strong spouse. But when I mentioned a kind man, 99 percent of the hands shot into the air, usually with a roar of "Yes, we want a kind man."

And I knew why that was what they wanted in

a husband. They had each seen their own father come home drunk night after night after spending on liquor what little their mother had earned working all day in the fields for two dollars. They watched helplessly as their father beat their mother over some trifling thing. They knew that was not the type of husband they wanted.

And that is how I learned what every girl wants in India. Will they get what they want? Well, the Catholic sisters work very hard to find a kind, responsible man for each girl when she reaches a marriageable age. So maybe they will. They deserve to have that.



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