



Next Generation Nepal

Newsletter

December 2009



Conor with the kids in Nepal

Dear Friends,

The Next Generation Nepal newsletter is back, with **THREE STORIES of how NGN reconnects trafficked children with their families**, after being taken from them during the decade long civil war in Nepal.

You're going to want to read these.

These extraordinary stories are the kinds of stories from NGN's feature in January 2009's edition of Reader's Digest. They are the kinds of stories that inspired **HarperCollins to publish NGN Founder Conor Grennan's memoir of Nepal** (Fall, 2010). "60

Minutes" and ABC news have already requested interviews.

But we still operate on a shoestring budget. We began by supporting 7 children; now we support 50. In our first mission into the mountains, with only photos of trafficked children, we found 24 families. Since then, we have found over 200 more families.

We need to do more, and we need your help. Please take a look at what we're doing, and consider whether this is something you would consider supporting. And drop us a line – we love hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Conor Grennan
Founder, Next Generation Nepal



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Three Stories:

How NGN is reconnecting trafficked children with their families

Nepal's decade-long civil war (1996-2006) destroyed thousands of lives. Parents, desperate to save their children from abduction by the Maoist rebels, paid child traffickers to take their children from the remote, rebel-controlled villages to Kathmandu, where they would be safe.

Traffickers collected vast sums from villagers and took the children. Then they simply abandoned the children in Kathmandu.

As many as thirty thousand children were lost to their families.



Children from remote parts of Nepal are trafficked into Kathmandu and abandoned.

ONE:

A grueling journey, and a child is reunited with his mother

For five years, even before NGN came into existence, Conor and NGN co-Founder Farid Ait-Mansour cared for a group of children who were trafficked seven years earlier from Humla, one of the most remote areas of Nepal. Because of the conflict, it was virtually impossible to leave the Kathmandu Valley to learn anything about their families.

In late 2006, just two weeks after the peace agreement officially ended the civil war, Conor ventured into Humla, still a Maoist stronghold, to search for the families of these children. With only photos and short bios of the children, Conor found the families of 24 children, families who had lost their young children years earlier.



Conor sitting with one of the families he found, surrounded by villagers.

The journey was done completely on foot, and took almost four weeks.

The families have remained too poor to take back their children. So last year, we did the next best thing. We



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took some of the children back to see their families, many for the first time in seven years.

Farid Ait-Mansour, a co-founder of Next Generation Nepal, brought six children from Kathmandu to Humla. The six children ranged in age – the oldest was 14, the youngest just 8. They had a difficult journey.

They took a bus fourteen hours to the southern town of Nepalganj, on the Indian border.



Six children make the grueling 9 day journey into Humla to see their parents for the first time in years.

Then they got on another bus and took it seventeen hours to get to Southern Humla, where the road ended. Farid and the six boys set off by foot. They walked for more than a week, many hours per day. They stopped each night, and talked about what they remembered. Once, they came across a simple bridge made of logs, falling in disrepair. The children asked if they could help rebuild it. Farid told them yes, of course. They wanted to do something, anything, for this incredibly impoverished region, where there were no roads, no electricity or running water, no indoor plumbing or wheeled vehicles or access to medicine. Together, they spent the afternoon repairing the small bridge with planks of wood they found discarded nearby. And again, they set off.

One day, one of the boys stopped and stared up the trail. Farid was walking behind him, and caught up to him. He asked him what he was looking at.

“My parents house is there, over the hill,” he said, breathlessly.

“So what are you waiting for?” Farid asked.

The boy paused again. The next words were harder.

“I’m afraid they’ve forgotten about me,” he said.

They arrived at the village at 4 p.m., only to find very few people there. Everybody was still in the fields. Farid and Dinesh sat down to wait.

After an hour, a woman came down the path. As she came closer, Dinesh tensed. This was his mother.

She walked down the path, looking at Dinesh and Farid, passing them slowly. Dinesh held his breath. The mother kept walking.



Dinesh sits with his family and tells them his story.

Then she stopped, and turned. She let out a cry of recognition and joy – she came rushing back, and threw herself at Dinesh’s feet, and together they held each other, weeping. She held his face, rambling that she couldn’t believe it, he was back. He was a man now, a teenager. When he was taken, he had been just a boy. But he was back.



Farid let Dinesh stay with his family for a week, while he visited other villages, bringing letters and photos for the parents of the children who were not able to come on this trip.

A week later, he returned to get Dinesh. It was time to return to Kathmandu. His parents would not be able to support him, not yet. Permanent reunification in Nepal is a painfully slow process; we work closely with the parents, and together we find ways of keeping them in touch while still supporting the child.



Dinesh herding his family's goats.

Before Dinesh left, he just had to finish herding the goats back into their enclosure. In a week, he had become a boy of the village again – his parents' son. They said goodbye, and gave him a tikka on his forehead as part of his leaving ceremony. He promised he would return.

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TWO:

Taken at three years old, Gopal is finally brought home

In 2008, Farid came across a woman in Kathmandu who had seven children in her guardianship – 5 boys and 2 girls. The woman asked Farid for money. She was a child trafficker.



Gopal, just three years old, is rescued from a child trafficker.

Like so many low-level traffickers, this woman had brought these children to Kathmandu to make a profit. The parents had paid her to take them to Kathmandu, where she had promised to put them in school. She never did.

The woman's plan was to find tourists who would give her money to take care of these "orphans", and she could pocket the cash while keeping the children locked away, slowly starving.

Farid tried to convince her that she was never going to be able to raise the money. He offered her a way out, a way that he could save the children. He offered to take them and try to reunite them with their families. She refused. But Farid didn't give up. Two weeks later, she agreed.

NGN was immediately able to reunite four of the children; the woman knew where the families were. But for three of the children, it was more difficult. They were step-children, and in Nepal, step-children are often not accepted back by their families. In these cases, NGN often must take these children in and cares for them.



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But there was one boy for whom this was especially difficult: Gopal was only three years old when he was taken from his family.



Gopal is reunited with his father and brother.

Farid and his team made several visits to the boy's village to speak to the parents, a four hour bus ride followed by a five hour trek through dusty trails. Farid did not have much hope of reuniting the child, but they wanted to at least reestablish a connection between the boy and his family and his home village. The father missed his son terribly, but was worried about taking him back. Farid promised that NGN would not leave him alone, and visited the family twice more to build a trusting relationship.

One day, a few months later, the father came to



Julien Lovera, NGN County Director, with a happy Gopal.

Kathmandu, signed the appropriate papers, and met his tiny son, for the first time in a very long year. Together, they went home to the village. NGN's Nepal Country Director, Julien Lovera, monitored the situation closely, visiting every month. Gopal was a village boy again, in the local school, getting the love and attention that every young child needs.

This was an unusual victory. Reunifications of this type are notoriously difficult; there are financial and cultural hurdles.

But we didn't give up. And we can succeed. But we only have one small team working on this project. It is labor-intensive, and we cannot afford a large staff, but we found a way to make it work.

We need a larger team to help bring more children home. But that requires funding.

THREE:

The boy who disappeared, and the miracle that brought him back

Imagine, after walking six days through the mountains, you show a mother the photo of her son, a son she lost three years earlier. For that mother, holding proof her son is alive, that is a moment of pure joy. Then imagine that, behind this mother, are another ten village women, all lined up to speak to you. They are waiting to ask you if you know where *their* children are. But you have no idea.

These are difficult moments, joy tempered by sorrow, by fear of where their children might be, of if they will ever be found. We are restricted only by funding.



Finding the mother of a trafficked child, who disappeared years earlier.

But when you keep searching for families, sometimes amazing things happen. That's what happened one day last year.

Farid, the co-founder of NGN, was in Humla, the remote, mountainous region of Northwestern Nepal, looking for families. One morning, a few hours after setting off on foot along the rocky trail, a young man, maybe twenty years old, approached him and his guide from up the path.



Hiking along the narrow trail through Humla.

"I hear that you are looking for families of lost children – is that true?" the man said. His name was Devi Lal.

Farid told him it was, that we knew many children in Kathmandu, and that we

were caring for fifty of them ourselves.

"I lost my little brother eight years ago," Devi Lal said. His name was Zippa Bhandari, he was six years old at the time. The Maoists attacked our village, so my father sent Zippa with a man named Phadera, who promised to take him to Kathmandu, to safety. We paid him ten months salary – we sold our animals and some of our land to pay him. We did not know he was a child trafficker. I never heard from my brother again."

Farid told him how sorry he was, but that he had never heard of the boy. "And you have no news at all of him?"

Devi Lal shook his head. "Five years ago I borrowed money and went to Kathmandu to search for him. It took me many days to get there. I visited twenty five children's homes, most of them illegal homes, run by traffickers. I never found him."

Farid had heard similar stories often in Humla. As gently as possible, Farid told the young man that there was little hope of finding the boy. "We are a very small organization, we don't have so many people," Farid said to him. "We can keep his name on file, but not much more. I'm very sorry – I'm afraid your brother may be gone."

One week later, Farid was back in Kathmandu, at the Umbrella Foundation – an NGN partner organization caring for almost three hundred trafficked children. Farid had been searching for



For some rescued trafficked children, we have little information about their past.



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the families of the children from Humla, and now he brought them back letters from their long lost parents, as well as photos of their families. But there was one boy he had nothing for.

Farid knew Deepak was from Humla, but nothing else was known about him. He was taken when he was very young. He knew almost nothing of his village, or of the names of his parents. Deepak knew he had two brothers, but he had grown up calling them “brother,” as was the custom. Farid desperately wanted to find some kind of connection for the boy, but he had no idea how he could with so little information.

A few months later, Farid was going off to another mission in the mountains of Humla to search for more families. This time, he took a photo of Deepak with him. In each village, he showed the photo of Deepak. Nobody knew him.

Then one day, down near the river, he came across Devi Lal, the brother of the missing boy. Farid called to him. Farid was not sure why, but he knew that one of the reasons he wanted so badly to come back to Humla, despite the difficulty of the journey, was to show Devi Lal one single photo.

The odds were extreme, he knew; Deepak was merely one child out of sixteen thousand that had been trafficked. There was virtually zero chance that Deepak and Zippa were the same boy. Still, Farid pulled out the photo of Deepak and showed it to Devi Lal.

Devi Lal took the photo. His hands shook.

“This is Zippa!” he exclaimed. He looked at Farid. “This is my brother!”

Zippa had been found.

Farid returned to Kathmandu not long after, and sat down with Deepak. He explained to the boy that his family had been found. That his name was not really Deepak at all. That he had a brother and a father and a community rejoicing that he was alive.

The NGN team continues to search the villages for families, but we can only afford two staff members dedicated to the work. There are so many children just like Deepak, lost to their families and communities. We continue to search. But we have a long way to go.

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Some of the kids NGN has rescued and now cares for.



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NGN needs your help.

Please visit our website at www.nextgenerationnepal.com to make a donation.

How much does it cost to change lives?

Here's a sample:

\$30 feeds a child for a month.

\$50 covers the cost of searching for one family in remote areas.

\$150 educates a child for one full year.

You can find much more information on [our site about how we spend your donations](#).

There is no minimum or maximum donation – every dollar helps!

Next Generation Nepal is a registered 501(c)3 non-profit organization in the State of New York.

All donations are tax deductible

Thank you for your continued support