



Lynn Veldman and her family have spent years traveling around the world. She became interested in the plight of Indian children born of prostitutes and is working with her daughters Kalli and Monica to raise awareness and funds for the orphanage Home of Hope.



Kalli Veldman, during spring break at Elon University, accompanied her mother to India to meet the orphan girls, including Abswini, who have been benefitting from the family's philanthropic efforts.

Neighbors

Veldman family devotes time and energy in support of Indian orphans

by Natalie K. Pollock

The Veldman family moved to town five years ago from Singapore. It was the first time the two teenaged daughters, who were raised in five different countries, had lived in the United States.

Despite feeling like strangers in their own homeland, the Veldman women continue to travel and look for ways to make a difference as far away as in India.

"My interest in India began as a result of my husband Jon, who grew up in India in the mid '60s, where his father was a missionary pediatrician and started a hospital in Miraj Maharashtra, south of Mumbai," said Lynn Veldman.

"He came to the U.S. in 1971. We traveled to southern India on family vacations and most recently I have taken up a cause to help the Home of Hope orphanage."

Older daughter Kalli, a freshman at Elon University, recently spent her spring vacation traveling with her mother to India. They toured the brothel village where young women are forced into prostitution and die from suicide or AIDS and their children are put into orphanages just outside the village walls. In the brothel village there is no clean water and no electricity. The inhabitants are considered untouchables, so they are denied citizenship and education. Prabhat Tara Sanstha (PTS), which means morning star society, is a proactive Christian organization that works there providing education, health services, training and weekly food rations. It also operates two orphanages: the Home of Hope for girls and the Boys Home.

"Children are provided one room as a safe haven while their moms are entertaining clients. And there is a preschool all week long and Sunday worship. They teach young ladies a special trade so that they are off-limits to pimps," said Mrs. Veldman.

She has visited India seven times already. On her first visit 24 years ago she met Timothy Jalam, an orphan from the village who was adopted by a Scottish missionary couple and became a preacher.

He started PTS with a school in the village. She was inspired by his work and dedication and decided she wanted to help the children.

Mrs. Veldman founded the Hope Shines charity to raise awareness in this area's communities and across the country "about women's rights issues and (the plight of) their impoverished children around the world." She is currently working on securing tax-deductible status from the federal government for her new organization so that people in Avon and surrounding towns who have expressed an interest in helping are able to get tax credit for their donations.

"Hope Shines works on specific activities that will build a bridge of compassion and understanding between our community and theirs. The projects will help make the orphanage self sustaining," she said.

"My Rotary Club (Simsbury/Granby) has helped me tremendously, as well as the generous support I have received from family and friends of this project. My dream is to raise awareness in an area where the privileged often lose sight of what really matters," added Mrs. Veldman.

Younger daughter Monica, a high school senior, has started a club called ICAN that stands for Indian Children's Angel Network. It has attracted a group of students who sponsor individual orphans and organize fund-raising events in support of specific projects in India.

The family has brought supplies to the orphanage and sent letters and photographs to the children, as well as funds for programs, vegetable gardens and fruit trees. With their funds the orphanage was able to buy a buffalo for milk.

"I have a friend who sends \$20 a month to pay for medication for one girl with AIDS. All the girls at the school pass their tests with the highest marks," Mrs. Veldman said.

"With donations we have been able to provide backpacks, flip flops, underwear and school supplies. Canton Valley dentists Peters, Clemenz and Kasperzack gave us toothbrushes, dental floss and tooth paste to bring to the children."

Sponsors who make a donation on a monthly basis were given pencil cases to decorate and fill with supplies, adding candy, makeup and other small gifts. Donors have also raised funds to build a new chicken coop. There are already 30 sponsors for 30 girls at Home for Hope.

Mrs. Veldman has been giving presentations on her charity work. She is a former teacher and psychologist from the Midwest whose family still lives in Chicago and Michigan.

Her father is a criminologist who served as a presidential adviser and director of the graduate school at Northwestern University. Her mother is an interior designer.

Mrs. Veldman met her husband at Hope College in Michigan. After they married, they moved around the world a lot.

In 1990 they went to Spain when he was working with General Motors in international operations and engineering and she took a sabbatical from counseling to go with him. Kalli was born in Spain, where they lived a total of 15 years.

Following a short time in Michigan, they transferred to Brazil when Mr. Veldman began working with the British Automotive Company. After the birth of their second daughter, the family lived in France for four years, where the girls were schooled in French and German, not English.

Then they were off to Japan.

"We spoke English in the family. I thought there was time for them to learn grammar. Monica went to an American school, but not Kalli. She was in an English as a second language (ESL) program. Kalli can still read Japanese," said Mrs. Veldman.

Her daughters became skilled at adapting to new circumstances and tried to fit in wherever the family relocated.

"They learned languages and not to stand out. Portuguese was their first language, but they can't remember any of it now. From Japan we moved to

Singapore. It was like paradise on Earth," she said.

Then her husband was hired by United Technologies as executive vice president for foreign operations with its Carrier division. The family returned to the U.S. in 2007 after 17 years abroad. They settled in Avon after researching schools in the area. Kalli was a high school freshman at the time.

"Coming here was like coming to a foreign country. Their English was perfect, but they had no popular culture knowledge," said Mrs. Veldman.

"We had adopted different spiritual beliefs because of our travels, so we do not belong to any one church in particular. The girls studied lots of religions and are spiritual. Spirituality is so personal."

In addition to her work in India, she also teaches English to Burmese refugees under the auspices of Catholic Charities and often goes to their homes and sits with their toddlers so that the new immigrants can go to the library and research information on jobs. Mrs. Veldman has befriended other foreign women who belong to Soroptimists and Rotary, finding a special commonality with them, like Julie McNeill and Dorien Boonvanostade.

"We met a couple of years ago playing tennis. We have both traveled a lot so became we are good friends. We are both interested in meeting people from abroad and we have been working together with refugees," said Ms. Boonvanostade.

Together they made a successful presentation to Rotary for a grant in support of their efforts in India and were invited to become members of the club. She hopes to be able to accompany her friend to India sometime. "For Lynn, it has been just as hard to relocate to America as elsewhere in the world, and her kids were born abroad. I do not have the same problems, but I can relate to people having a hard time living here," she said. The women have done so well convincing people in their circles to get involved with the orphanage that they have run out orphans to assign to new sponsors, for the time being. They ask for a \$50 donation from each sponsor. "People here are very generous and want to find a way to help. They have a lot to give and want to give. We have provided something very personal. They can give and get something back that they can see and touch," said Mrs. Veldman.

Kalli has photographed their experiences in India and placed her work on Facebook. Her friends have responded with an interest in getting involved. Monica's group is focusing on raising awareness with their friends and other students.

With \$1,500 that they sent to India, the organization there built a water tank and put in a filter in just three days, supported by a grant from Rotary. Other funds were used to buy 50 chickens for laying eggs.

All of their work is paying off in tangible results for the donors as well as the orphaned children in India they are supporting. For more information e-mail lynnveldman@gmail.com. **AL**

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