

Annual General Meeting

The annual meeting of IH held on March 18, 2004 was well attended. The highlight of the evening was our keynote speaker, Sonia Michalysheh, our co-founder. Here is a synopsis of her text:

Malawi Reflections

In a unique reaction to mid-life angst, Sonia and her husband Merv decided to dedicate three years of their lives to the impoverished people in Malawi, Africa. Landlocked Malawi is one of the world's poorest countries known for wide spread poverty and malnutrition. Health problems include malaria, TB, Cholera and a rapidly increasing HIV/Aids pandemic. After four months of training in Toronto, the Michalyshehs arrived in the remote village of Rumphii. Merv taught school and Sonia worked in the local health clinic run by the "blue" nuns, a name which described the nuns' habit, not their mood. There were many obstacles to overcome: language, lack of medical supplies, local customs and the conspiracy of silence surrounding HIV/AIDs. The REAP project, described in our last newsletter, helped to break the silence. Local customs, however, foster the spread of AIDS. Since nursing mothers are not allowed to resume conjugal relations with their husbands, the men seek out sex in the community. Young virgins are believed to be a cure for AIDS so that this cohort is extremely vulnerable to infection. Diseases such as AIDS have resulted in thousands of orphaned children. There are over 800 orphans in the Rumphii area alone. Relatives are expected to care for these orphans and many women end up selling their bodies to provide food for their ever-increasing families. In the clinic, Sonia found little or no medical care, unsanitary conditions and few medical supplies. Since inhabitants of Rumphii all cook over open fires, burns were a common condition. Children often fell into pots of boiling water. Sonia also learned to cure snake bites by what she described as "witch craft". This method requires charcoaled beef marrow soaked in milk to be applied to the bite. Not something you learn in your nursing education! Merv and Sonia have been back in Canada for over a year but the warm memories of their Rumphii experience remain.

Ukraine Encore

It appears that IH will be sending at least one and possibly two containers to Zaporizhzhya again this year. Negotiations are currently underway with Louie Sawatzky and the Mennonite Benevolent Society to finance the shipments and assist with the packing. Large equipment such as beds and stretchers are needed for the nursing homes and hospitals in the area.

We have received heartfelt letters of thanks for last year's shipment and a touching photo of a happy recipient.



Tamara enjoying her new geriatric chair

Children of the Ukraine

Over the winter Irene Osinchuk was busily packing supplies for Help Us Help The Children a project of Children of Chernobyl Canadian Fund. These supplies were distributed amongst 50 orphanages in the Ukraine. Dressing supplies were very much appreciated. Every year Irene volunteers at one of the camps run by HUHTC. Approximately 500 orphanage children are selected and transported to one of four camps located in the beautiful Carpathian Mountains. For two weeks these children have fun participating in the usual camp activities and learning life skills. A fellow counselor writes: "In spite of their circumstances, they (the children) remained positive and optimistic. They were eager to hear of stories about life in Canada and many expressed a desire to travel here one day". Thank you Irene for being such a great ambassador for Canada and for sending our supplies to such a worthy organization.



Orphans enjoying camp life

Dental Care in Zambia

Herb and Iris Newman have just returned from Kitwe, Zambia after an adventure of a lifetime. They, along with four other volunteers and two dentists, Aaron Kim and Brent Wong, set up a make-shift clinic in a large orphanage and school called the Village of Hope. 68 children live in the orphanage and 611 children attend the school. A Canadian couple, Sergio and Nancy Bersaglio, started the Village and are still running it with plans for expansion. The eight travelers on the trip took supplies from IH. Brent and Aaron gave dental exams and treatment to approximately 800 children and adults. One woman had stopped eating because the pain was so intense from her rotting teeth. Multiple extractions were a lifesaver for her. All the travelers commented on how happy everyone was even though AIDS and other disasters had robbed the children of parents. No one complained and everyone sang – that would be joy indeed!

Lesotho

Sister Vera Hoelscher from the Sisters of the Holy Name paid a second visit to the warehouse to pack a suitcase destined for Peka Lesotho. As with much of Africa, AIDS and famine have devastated the population. The Sisters manage four clinics in Peka one of which is a maternity clinic. These clinics attract the destitute, those who are unable to pay for services at a government run clinic. We received a letter of appreciation from Sister Teresa Seeta who runs the St. Rose Health Centre.



Expectant Mothers at St. Rose Health Centre

Headhunter Country

Phyllis Reader recently returned from a medical mission to Mon, Nagaland, a very remote, isolated province in Northern India. Nagaland is so cut off from the rest of the world that its citizens have never encountered foreigners. Headhunting was only banned in the 1960s. In fact, when the medical team visited the King, souvenirs of this practice hung all over his palace. Phyllis scrubbed for the Medical Missions International surgeons who performed approximately 135 surgeries under very primitive conditions. There was no anaesthetic or blood supply on hand. When a patient lost too much blood one of the visiting nurses donated

hers. With only sporadic medical attention, Mon citizens either died from their disease or lived with it as shown in the accompanying picture. Phyllis tells the story of the 5 or 6 adults who had lived with the humiliation of a severe cleft palate and cover their faces at all times until a team of surgeons came to their rescue. They still talk about the miracle of a normal appearance. One can only imagine the impact of the surgery on their lives. IH has just sent 10 boxes of supplies to MMI.



Woman with a large goiter

Warehouse Workhorses!

A hearty thanks to the dedicated women who donate a morning each week to help sort, pack and organize the supplies in the warehouse. These women are: Liz Wijtkamp, Elsie Liwiski, Mary Lutes, Mattie Phalen, Jean Matthews, Judy Brown and Val McIntyre. Lynn Heise and Shirley Ashton also help out whenever they are in the city. Dawn Mackling has just joined the group. Once a month Phyllis and her OR nurse colleagues sort medical equipment that none of the rest of us can identify. Joan Brown, Corliss Vancaeseele, Giselle Donnelly and Sylvia Dolynchuk comprise that group. Volunteering is fun and not all work. Roma, our wonderful director, has the coffee on hand while we work, chat and share our stories. She makes sure everyone feels welcome and useful. Come join us and see for yourself.

Attention Teachers

We are collecting any scribbles, pens pencils and any other school supplies you might have to include in our shipments. Many children in the countries we ship to do not have these basic school supplies and would appreciate even a pen. We are also collecting used candles for everyday use in third world countries. If you have anything to donate please contact one of IH's volunteers.

Thanks

Many thanks to Don Popien for scanning the pictures for our newsletters. Although not an IH volunteer, Don has given freely of his time to work on the photos.

For more information about IH please visit our website at: www.westminsterchurchwinnipeg.ca/hope