

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

OF MANCHESTER

PRESIDENT

Susan Hollick

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Dear Club Members

Apologies that this Newsletter is a month late. Not that I feel that this is our fault because in spite of numerous pleas for contributions, in the form of personal anecdotes or items which might be of interest, we failed to receive any response. Since the last Newsletter, the only social event has been the Strawberry Tea and so we have decided to take this opportunity to update you in detail on our two overseas projects Mary's Meals and Orissa.



STRAWBERRY TEA

On Sunday, 28th July, Yvonne very kindly opened her garden and home for our summer celebration. We had been enjoying lovely weather but as the day approached it became somewhat unsettled and the question in our minds was would it be safe to plan a totally out-of-doors event. We were optimistic. Seating was put out, a gazebo erected to give some shade from the sun but playing safe the food was kept indoors. Members and friends arrived and were no sooner settled outside enjoying each other's company than rain began to fall – gently at first and then much more heavily to the extent that those in the gazebo, considering themselves safe from a gentle shower, were marooned for 15 minutes before being rescued with umbrellas. Our attention then turned to the food and everyone enjoyed the delicious and plentiful summer fayre in true Soroptimist fashion.



The weather improved somewhat and, in spite of the conditions under foot, some members were cajoled into outdoor games, quoits, boules and skittles. It was not always the most competitive who won the most prizes! A lot of luck was involved.



We had as a guest Yvonne Gibbon representing the Soroptimist BIG Project (Birthing in the Gambia) and it was decided that money from the raffle would be donated to this cause. We had some excellent prizes and the raffle raised £120 which was made up to £150 by the Club. As a result of the generous



President Susan, Yvonne Gibbon, Sue U, Stella and Baby

donations of food by many people, we raised £300 for the Club Dinner Fund from the ticket money. Thanks are due to all those who helped in so many ways but especially to Yvonne for allowing the invasion.

Kathleen Beavis

HELEN LATTO SOROPTMIST PRIZE

Due to Yvonne's indisposition President Susan and I attended the Junior RNCM Prize Giving this year. It is such a happy event and we were able to chat to several of the prizewinning students both before and after presenting their prizes. The Helen Latto Soroptimist Prize was awarded to Grace Wyatt, a soprano who is to continue her studies at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Barbara Valcaccia

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## DAVID AND GOLIATH

A couple of weeks ago, the following article, together with lovely photographs, occupied a full page of the Sunday Telegraph. I think it makes fascinating reading for S I Manchester members:-

A primitive Indian tribe that worships its remote jungle mountain as a living god has inflicted a humiliating defeat on one of Britain's wealthiest billionaires over his plans to open a vast aluminium ore mine on their land.

Anil Agarwal, who rose from humble beginnings as a scrap metal dealer in one of India's poorest states to a life of luxury in Mayfair, had planned to boost his fortune by mining and processing bauxite in **Niyamgiri, Orissa, south-east India.**

He promised to bring new jobs, build schools and hospitals to bring the hill's "backward" Dongria Kondh tribesmen into the modern world. But his plan, which was agreed with the Orissa state government as far back as 2005, infuriated the Dongria, who saw it as an attack not only on their way of life but also on Niyamraja, the sacred hill they worshipped as their provider.



They launched a protest movement to save their verdant tropical forest, populated by tigers, leopards and elephants, from Mr. Agarwal's plans to replace its mango and sal trees with mine shafts and roads. And this week they clinched a decisive victory. Lakhapadar, the largest of 12 Dongria villages on Niyamgiri, rejected the mine plan unanimously in a vote described by an Indian minister as a historic moment in the country's democracy - the first time the government had allowed its tribal people to decide their own future.

The Dongria speak Kui, a language few outsiders understand, and live in remote mud hut villages with little contact with the outside world. They live without electricity and have survived without schools and hospitals. Few, if any, of them have ever been to the nearest town, Bhawani-patna, two hours away by car, or watched a Bollywood film.

Their men, who keep sharp forest axes hooked over their shoulders and wear clips and combs in their centre-parted, pony-tailed hair, collect bananas, mangoes, oranges and medicinal plants from the forest and barter some of their bounty for salt, cloth and other items they cannot find. Dongria women have three nose rings and wear few clothes except for a backless sari cloth that loosely covers their breasts.

The conflict between their world and that of Mr Agarwal emerged after the tycoon's Vedanta Resources began building a vast aluminium refinery



at the foot of Niyamgiri to process the bauxite he was confident he would be allowed to mine below its higher slopes. Many Dongria were forced to leave their homes and their traditional subsistence living to make way for the construction.

Their eviction led to a series of legal challenges that culminated with a Supreme Court order for the villagers themselves to decide on the £1 billion mine investment in a series of votes. On Wednesday, several hundred Dongria gathered for the 10th and largest of 12 village council elections in what the government regarded as the decisive vote.

*The Daily Telegraph* travelled with Judge Sarat Chandra Mishra, appointed to record their decision, as he made his way under the thick forest canopy on the steep hike to Lakhapadar. The judge was accompanied by several hundred armed police to protect him after the government alleged that the area had become 'infested' with Maoist insurgents. The tribesmen say the claim is false and the government has used it to justify a campaign of intimidation against them.



Under a makeshift pagoda in Lakhapadar and amid driving monsoon rain, villagers wielding their axes and squatting on their haunches were called out one by one by the judge to record their vote and make a speech. Their angry rejections were broadcast across the hills over a public address system powered by a generator. It quickly became clear that no one was prepared to support the state government and Vedanta's vision of progress. Many promised to attack any officials or company staff who tried to exploit their hill.

Sikaka Kunji, a 50-year-old grandmother with nose-rings and a white backless sari, sent fellow villagers scurrying as she started swinging an axe in the air to express her anger. "I will sacrifice my life, I will use my axe and cut whoever comes for mining," she said. The state government had deployed armed police on the hill to intimidate her villagers, she claimed. "They are using the police force and disturbing us in our homes. We don't want them and we are telling the government and the company we will cut them with our axes. Niyamraja is

our god," she added.

Accounts of intimidation of villagers appeared to be corroborated when *The Daily Telegraph* reporter and photographer were detained by police intelligence officers and a local campaigner was summoned to their headquarters in Bhawanipatna for questioning and denounced as a "foreign agent"\* for assisting this paper. A spokesman for Vedanta said it "categorically rejects and abhors all forms of violence, intimidation and coercion. We are very disappointed and surprised to hear these allegations."

But other villagers confirmed that intimidation by police was a way of life. Sikuka Sani, 36, said: "We are getting beaten up and we are living in terror. We have been unable to go to the nearby villages because the police goons follow us. We don't want the refinery and this kind of development. For thousands of years we have been living here and for thousands of years our children will live here."

Mr Sani said he rejected the development and expressed the hope that his eight-year-old son Dili would never go to school, watch television or play computer games. But he conceded that despite the famous victory of his small village over a mining giant, the march of development was probably unstoppable.

"Once he is educated, he will leave this mountain and learn this lifestyle. He will sell our land to the company. At these schools, they don't teach how to live with nature, they teach how to live by exploitation," he said.

I copied the article and e-mailed it to Eliazar who replied as follows:-

*"Well – That's incredible that it has been so well broadcast. This is the power of grass roots democracy - The Gram Panchayat. All of these GP come together for a central District meeting - Sakuntala - a Tribal woman who **started life with us is now a Gram Panchayat Vice Chairman** - I am on my way to Muniguda tonight and will meet her. I will give you more feedback - Can you imagine that Soroptimists - your group gave to cataract eye surgery in this same place - (Might have been the woman described in the story!!!!). Thanks! Will come with more on it."*

I have not yet received Eliazar's update.

**Maureen Heywood**

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MARY'S MEALS

One of the schools receiving Mary's Meals is the **Jacaranda School for Orphans**, which was started by Marie Da Silva who was born and raised in Malawi and worked as a nanny in the U S for nineteen years. She lost fifteen members of her family in Malawi to the AIDS pandemic, including her father and two of her brothers. In 2002, after realizing many children were left out of school in her home village of Che Mboma, she founded the **Jacaranda School for Orphans** within her family house. For seven years, she spent a third of the monthly income she earned working as a nanny on the salaries of the teachers and the few school supplies she could afford. Eventually the school began to receive Mary's Meals. The following is the story of one the school's pupils.

Just a few years ago, John's dream was simply to survive, and to have a new set of clothes and enough food to be able to attend school. After losing both of his parents to AIDS at a very young age, John was moved between relatives' houses before being totally abandoned at the age of eight and ending up on the streets, begging for money and food. His day-to-day life was a struggle and he had to travel alone to hospital on foot to pick up his HIV medication, which he needs to keep him alive.

When he heard about Jacaranda School for Orphans, his life changed. He said:

"One day I heard that there was a school nearby that was only for orphans and that everything was free there. We did not have to pay school fees or buy books or buy a uniform. The school provided all this...The school allowed me to start. I was very happy. I really wanted to go to school."

The 400 children attending Jacaranda School for Orphans receive Mary's Meals every school day. For John, the porridge served in school provides life-saving nutrition as it enables his medicine to work properly. *"When I started here I received my uniform, then I received my porridge...just like everyone else, so I felt the same as them."*

And not only has John learned to read and write - thanks to Mary's Meals and Jacaranda - his writing has been recognised by the Queen, whom he recently met after writing the winning entry to the Royal Commonwealth Essay Competition and fended off competition from another 8,500 entries. He was invited to Buckingham Palace in recognition of his achievement and his journey - which took him on three planes - inspired his new life goal to become a pilot. His essay, called "The Day I Wore My Best Clothes", tells the story of his transition from a street beggar to well-dressed student. John's essay is as follows:



"The Day I Wore My Best Clothes"

My father and mother died when I was very young. I do not remember. I went to live with my relatives in a village very far from town. And then one day, my relatives brought me to a village near a school. They could not look after me, so I was moved from one relative to another. Then I lived with my uncle. We lived both of us in a small house. I was eight years old. One day my uncle left me and never returned. He left me alone.



I did not know what to do. So I started begging on the streets. People gave me money and I bought food. Before my uncle left, he took me to the hospital because I was getting sick a lot. So the hospital gave me medicine that I had to take every month. They told me at the hospital that if I did not take this medicine I would die. After I started taking this medicine, I was not getting sick very much.

The hospital where I took my medicine was very far, so I had to walk each month to get my medicines. I never forgot because I did not want to die. They showed me how to take the medicine. Four pills each day. But now I take one each day.

I continued to beg on the streets and sometimes people in the village gave me food. There was a lady in the village who used to give food to children some days in the week. Her name was Mrs. Limbani. I did not have any clothes or shoes. I wore my old torn clothes that I had for many years. I wanted to go to school but I never had a uniform. We are not allowed to start school unless we have a uniform and some copies of books. I did not have that so I just spent my days begging on the streets and my nights I went home to sleep alone in my house. My uncle never came back and when I went to my other relatives, they said they did not have money to feed me.

One day I heard that there was a school nearby that was only for orphans and that everything was free there. We did not have to pay school fees or buy books or buy a uniform. The school provided all this. So I went to ask the school if I could go there. The school allowed me to start. I was very happy. I really wanted to go school. Then the day came when they gave me a new school uniform. It was the happiest day because I had new clothes. Now I looked like all the other children. I did not look poor like a beggar and no one could tell I had HIV. I looked just like everyone else. This day was very special to me. I felt good about myself and I think I looked good in my new school uniform.

I am now at the same school. It is called The Jacaranda School for Orphans. We are 400 orphans at the school. It is primary and secondary and then they send us to college. I love my school and I do sports, and love to dance modern dance called house dancing. We do this all at school. I love art too.

Now I live with an aunt. The school gives her money every month to buy food for me and things like soap. I do not have to beg on the streets and wear torn clothes. I still go to hospital to get my medicine by myself, but I now take a minibus.

I love my uniform; it is a purple shirt and grey trousers. And I wear shoes and socks too.

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## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

### Peggy Howarth

As you all know, Peggy has moved to The Hawthorns Care Home in Wilmslow and she would love to hear from you. Her personal landline is 01625 527 964

The address of the home is:-

The Hawthorns

Hawthorn Street, Wilmslow, SK9 5EJ

### Coffee Pot Lunch

It has been decided that this year the Coffee Pot Lunch will be held after Christmas.

**Birthday Greetings** to the following members, each of whom celebrates her birthday in the next couple of months.

|                   |                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Barbara Valcaccia | 22 <sup>nd</sup> September |
| Margaret Cropper  | 14 <sup>th</sup> October   |
| Fiona Spencer     | 25 <sup>th</sup> October   |
| Rosemary Steven   | 2 <sup>nd</sup> November   |
| Evelyn Nichols    | 4 <sup>th</sup> November   |
| Val Moss          | 5 <sup>th</sup> November   |
| Shena Cuttle      | 8 <sup>th</sup> November   |
| Yvonne Mullen     | 17 <sup>th</sup> November  |
| Sue Underwood     | 17 <sup>th</sup> November  |



### DIARY DATES

|            |                                      |                                                                                                   |
|------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wednesday, | 12 <sup>th</sup> Oct                 | - Friendship Evening at President Susan's home.<br>7pm for 7.30pm.                                |
| Thursday   | 1 <sup>st</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> Nov | - SIGBI Conference, Gateshead.                                                                    |
| Friday,    | 6 <sup>th</sup> Dec                  | - Old England Night, Masonic Hall, Ashton-u-Lyne.                                                 |
| Tuesday,   | 4 <sup>th</sup> Dec                  | - tba                                                                                             |
| Saturday,  | 7 <sup>th</sup> Dec                  | - Regional Meeting at Leigh Sports Centre<br>- PAC 10am for 10:30am, followed by Business Meeting |

### Christmas Greetings

Those who wish to send greetings via the December Newsletter are asked to have their messages ready for the November Meeting.

**Copy** for the next edition of the Newsletter by, 18<sup>th</sup> November, please. Personal anecdotes would be welcomed.

**Kathleen Beavis**

**Maureen Heywood**