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(Good Tidings)

August 2003



**Menno-Clinic  
INDIA**

## Created in God's Image

*Kira Stoltenberg*

My first taste of India actually started somewhere in the air between Moscow and New Delhi. As I boarded the plane I was happy to see that my ticket lead me to a seat next to an Indian woman. Once airborne I turned to her, smiled and asked if she lived in Delhi. That was all the encouragement she needed. Her face lit up and I learned all about her family and Delhi and of course she had many questions for me as well. Partway through our conversation she got up, pulled a tin out of her bag and proceeded to share her spicy and delicious curry with me. She continued to give me advice on India and shoved a small candle into my hand as a gift. My heart was touched by the warmth and hospitality this woman showed to me, a complete stranger. Looking back, I see that this brief experience foreshadowed my time in India.

Since my feet touched Indian soil I have been welcomed and invited into so many homes, I have shared countless cups of chai with relative strangers and have been at the receiving end of so much generosity. Just this morning I heard a knock on my door and when I opened it there was Hepsiba's smiling face holding a string of jasmine for me to put in my hair. "America no coming" she said between giggles.

There is also another side to India. There is physical and emotional suffering due to an incurable disease and the stigma attached to it. India has just celebrated conquering leprosy and has been dealt yet another epidemic, HIV/AIDS. This is what brought me to the Menno Clinic for the summer, so that I could assess the HIV/AIDS situation in the area surrounding Chiluvuru. My search has taken me to the capitol of the state, small towns in surrounding areas, and centers where I have been able to talk with HIV positive patients.

*One of the main things I have learned from my time here is the importance of love for people you do not even know.*

The presence of HIV/AIDS in India is still a foreign concept to many. One of the difficult aspects of this situation is that many people testing positive could not have prevented it. It is speculated that in many cases, men visit a prostitute and become infected with HIV. Many of these men are either already married, or get married not knowing they are HIV positive. Thus, their monogamous wives become infected. Often both do not know they are HIV positive, and they become pregnant and if preventative measures are not taken the child often contracts HIV. Right now the statistics vary, but the consensus of NGO's in this area is that 10% of the population is HIV positive in the district where the Menno-Clinic is located. Many people do not know they are HIV positive. Those that are aware of their HIV status feel they must keep it a secret from their family and community. The social stigma is still very strong and many people are rejected when they need support and help the most.

Treatment to counteract the virus is only available to about 10% of the population due to financial limitations. Therefore, in most cases only opportunistic infections (infections, like TB, that HIV patients are more susceptible to because they immune system is not functioning well) are being treated, and nothing is done to slow the course of HIV/AIDS. *(Continued on back)*

## Created In God's Image

(Continued)

At first the injustice of the disparity in medical care hit me. It angered me that it really only came down to money and where you lived. While I still struggle with this, something else was revealed to me as I visited more centers. In the most difficult of circumstances I have seen people shine. I visited a home for children who are HIV positive. The doctor showed me a four-month-old baby boy who was so tiny and emaciated; too weak to even suck on a bottle. He had been abandoned days earlier due to his HIV status. His prospects were not good but you could tell how attached the staff had already become. They told me how only a month earlier they had lost a five-month-old baby girl. I looked around and saw how the staff put their whole heart into their work knowing that in the end it would break. I noticed the same thing over and over again. India has so few resources to help, but even in the face of this, patients are receiving what they need most--love and support while the rest of their world is crumbling. There are of course larger issues that need to be tackled, but one of the main things I have learned from my time here is the importance of love for people you do not even know. Even if this tiny baby boy does not stay with us, his brief life will have ended in loving arms. These workers face death each day, yet their very presence exudes joy and love.

Remember Hepsiba who knocked on my door this morning with flowers? The staff told me how her sister-in-law, who has now passed on, was HIV positive. The rest of the family abandoned her. Hepsiba stayed by her side, even holding her hands together for her sister in law to vomit into, until the end came. Human nature is capable of so much hurt, yet it seems that when there is the most need, many souls feel this and respond with generous love. So many people, like Hepsiba have shown me what it means "to be created in God's image." I have seen Jesus' touch and the resulting peace that comes not from a cure, but from being loved.

*Kira Stoltenberg served three months in India researching the HIV/AIDS needs.*

## From The Board

*Doc Yarlagadda*

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord.

Last November (2002) when we visited the clinic, we realized that things hadn't been going as good as they should. Not many people were visiting the clinic. I knelt down in the chapel and prayed. I said "Lord! We have done what we can. This job is bigger than what we have envisioned and we cannot handle it. Now it's your turn to run this place." It sounds like the Lord is running the show now. We treat 30 to 50 people every day in the clinic where as it had been 3 to 4 people before. Things are running really well. The Chapel is being used regularly, with the new converts meeting there every Sunday. The clinic and the Chapel are in Lord's hands. My prayer in the Chapel that day has been answered. Please continue to pray for Menno-Clinic. Khuda Hafeez  
(*God be with you*)



## Financial Corner

### Menno-Clinic, India

January 31, 2003

Cash	<u>\$45,117.74</u>
Total Assets	\$45,117.74

#### Receipts & Disbursements Sept. 1, 2002 through May. 31, 2003

Donations	\$62,669.40
Interest	<u>272.45</u>
Total Receipts	\$62,941.85
Expenses & transfers to India	<u>36,885.43</u>
Net Receipts	\$26,056.42