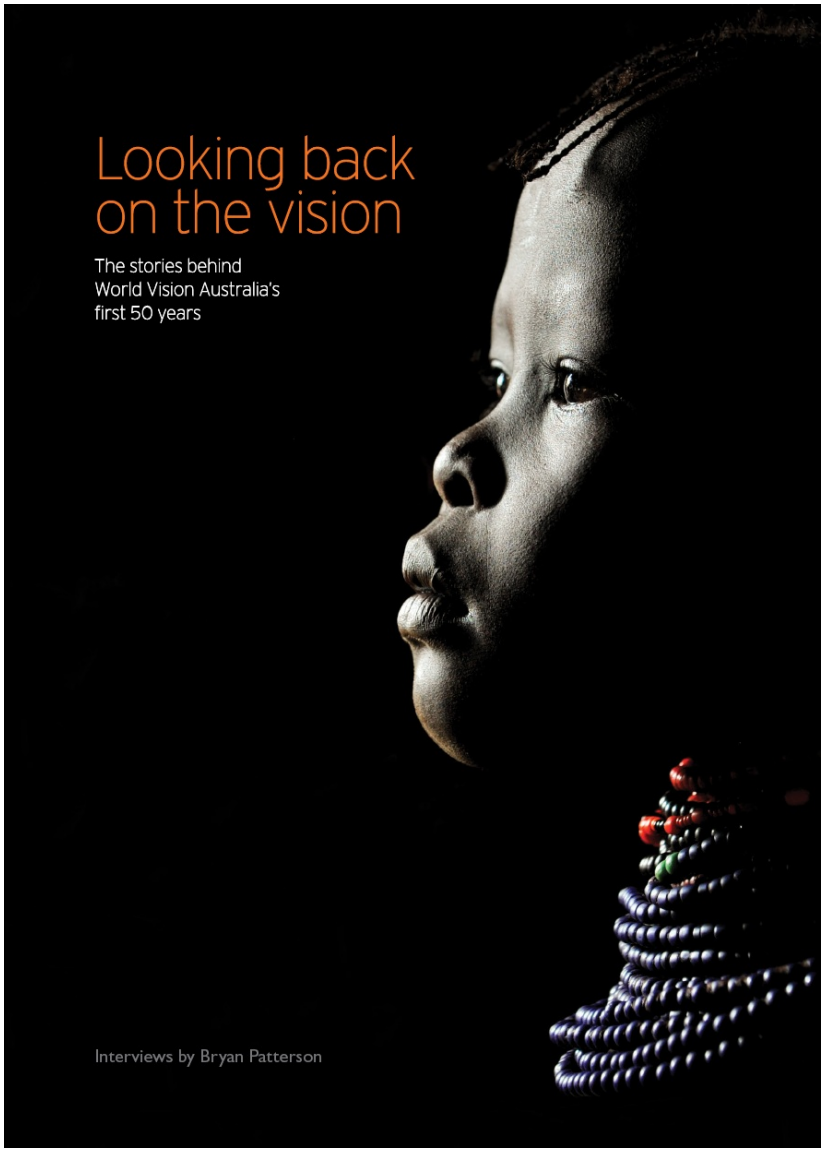
Looking back on the vision

The stories behind
World Vision Australia's
first 50 years

Interviews by Bryan Patterson



This book is the culmination of the input, support and prayers of many wonderful people.

Firstly, I wish to thank Tim Costello, Leigh Cameron and Seak-King Huang for placing their trust in me to write this extraordinary story of World Vision Australia's first 50 years.

I have been blessed by the beautiful souls on the journey who allowed me to talk things over, offered advice and historical material, allowed me to quote their remarks and assisted in the editing, proofreading and design. Thank you.

To the inspiring women and men of World Vision – far too many to list here – who gave generously and graciously of their time to tell the stories that are the substance of this book, I am deeply indebted.

And my special thanks to my wife Dawn, whose never-failing advice, constant love and encouragement kept me focused on the mission.

This book is dedicated to all those people who believe in empowering their brothers and sisters around the planet to bring about transformation. Thank you. You inspire us.

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PRELUDE

TIM Costello is on the beach at Banda Aceh, Indonesia, not long after it has been hit by one of the most devastating natural disasters in recorded history.

It is early January 2005, days after the giant earthquake rumbled beneath the waters of the Indian Ocean, triggering a powerful tsunami that smashed into the shorelines of 14 countries, demolishing towns and killing more than 230,000 people.

No area has been as badly hit as Banda Aceh. This is ground zero.

About a third of the 320,000 residents of Banda Aceh are dead or missing.

Corpses are being recovered and buried in mass graves. Locals and emergency aid workers are working frantically to find survivors and to clean up the mess. The carnage is of a scale that defies comprehension.

An Australian TV crew sees Tim, the new CEO of World Vision Australia, on the destroyed beach and the reporter goes for a soundbite.

“Reverend Costello,” he asks, “you are a man of God. If God exists, how do you explain all this devastation?”

Tim looks around, and says: “I can’t explain to you the events that occurred but I want you to cast the camera around and look what’s happening right now with this extraordinary human response. That’s God at work.”

It is a spontaneous and yet profound answer; a statement of faith in the face of calamity. It is what World Vision is all about.

“I hadn’t planned to say it,” Tim is to explain later. “The heart is always way ahead of the head. And the head often doesn’t understand where the heart is. I think World Vision and the experiences I’ve had have been all about that.”

From its beginning, World Vision was always going to be about the imaginative fire of the spirit, the songs of the heart and the reality of faith. The faith that we can make a real and positive change in the lives of the world’s poor and oppressed if we try.

Believing the seemingly unbelievable – that we can all make that difference – and then choosing to live under its promises is no small thing. It requires a willingness to be stretched beyond safe limits.

For 50 years, World Vision Australia has been at the forefront of a bold mission, tackling emergencies through relief, acting against injustice, standing with the oppressed and changing countless lives through child sponsorship and long-term development in some of the harshest environments in the world.

It has created no monuments but has left footprints right across the globe – from the war-torn streets of Vietnam and the killing fields of Rwanda to the deserts of Ethiopia, the mountains of Nepal, the hellholes of Cambodia and far beyond.

The journey over half a century has been marked by hopes and amazing triumphs, as well as disappointments and frustrations. It has required patience, commitment, professionalism and unwavering perseverance.

As Tim Costello says: “World Vision has made every mistake there is to make but we’ve learnt from it.”

In almost every major crisis, every natural disaster and famine over the past 50 years, Australians working for World Vision have played key roles in alleviating the suffering.

The stories in this book hopefully pay proper tribute to the many extraordinary World Vision Australia men and women who have “marched off the map” to serve in developing countries where the rewards are few and the dangers are many, and to the passionate and gifted professionals who support them in so many ways in World Vision’s offices around the nation.

And to the thousands of families and individuals who sponsor children and donate to vital projects, the participants in the 40 Hour Famine, the donors who remember World Vision in their Wills and corporate organisations, businesses and churches who support the vital work. But most of all it is to the ordinary Australians who have compassion for the real concerns in the world and believe that lives can be changed, that we pay tribute.

The people featured in this book generously and openly shared their most personal and often extraordinary stories – sometimes with tears flowing – in the hope that their experiences might inspire others to also make a difference.

Today, World Vision is Australia’s largest charitable group, working in about 100 countries. More Australians entrust more money to World Vision than any other charity in the country. With the support of more than 400,000 Australians, World Vision Australia helps more than 20 million people every year.

Fifty years is an important milestone. But it is not the end of a journey that must continue in a world that needs so much healing. The mission goes on.

This was the prayer for the future given at the close of a World Vision Australia staff devotion recently:

“May God bless us with discomfort. Discomfort about easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships – so that we may love deeply in our hearts.

“May God bless us with anger. Anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people and our Earth – so that we may work for justice,

freedom and peace.

“May God bless us with the tears to shed. Tears for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war – so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them and transform that pain to joy.

“May God bless us with foolishness. Enough foolishness to believe that we really can make a difference in this world – so that we are able to do what others claim cannot be done.”

That’s the sort of faith that enables even the battered and beaten on the greyest days to see life as a love story. It’s a faith that changes lives.

1

FROM LITTLE THINGS, BIG THINGS GROW

THE seed for World Vision was planted quietly but dramatically in a small town in Asia. It was remarkably unpremeditated.

It started with one young man and an abandoned and battered little girl named White Jade.

The man was the entrepreneurial Bob Pierce, who started preaching at the age of 13 and set out to evangelise the world in 1947. He left the US, and headed for China, but with only enough money to get to Hawaii.

With audacious faith, Bob Pierce eventually made it to China where he led evangelistic rallies for four months.

The story of what happened next has had several variations, even when told later by Bob Pierce himself. But the heart of it is that he accepted a last-minute invitation to speak at a girls' school on an island off Amoy. That night was to change Bob Pierce and the world.

As always, Bob Pierce gave the simple gospel message and several girls accepted Christ. He challenged the young converts to go home and tell their families they were now Christians.

Days later, he returned to the school and was met by the principal, the Dutch Reform missionary Tena Holkeboer, who held a skinny 11-year-old girl in her arms. This was White Jade.

The child's back was still bleeding from a beating with a bamboo rod her father had given her when she announced that she was now a follower of Jesus Christ.

"This little girl did what you told her to do and now she has lost everything," Tena said.

Shocked and dismayed, Bob Pierce replied: "Well, you'll take care of her, won't you?"

"I am feeding as many children as I can," the missionary said. "The question isn't what I am going to do. The question is what are you going to do about it?"

With that, she thrust the sobbing child into the evangelist's arms.

Bob Pierce was later to recall that moment: "I stood there with the child in

my arms. Tears were running down her cheeks. She was scared to death, shaking in my arms. She was heavy and my arms were getting tired. I was shaken to the core … I had never been held accountable for any consequences of my message. Now I was faced with, 'Is what I say true? Is there any responsibility involved?' Believe me, you do some thinking at a moment like that.

"I'd run away from big needs but I couldn't run away from a little 11-year-old girl."

If he could not save the world, at least he could save one child.

He pulled out his last five dollars from a pocket, promising to send more each month when he got home. That small seed of hope and trust was to become a foundation for World Vision's child sponsorship program, which changed the world for millions of children over the next decades.

He would later reflect, "I didn't know it at the time but, in a real, practical sense, World Vision was born that day."

Bob Pierce was soon after to write these haunting words in the flyleaf of his Bible: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God." It was to become World Vision's raison d'être.

He continued supporting White Jade each month until he lost contact with her after the 1949 communist takeover of China.

The seed that was to become World Vision began to sprout in early 1950 when Bob Pierce met renowned Korean church leader, educator and social activist Pastor Kyung-Chik Han, just before the outbreak of the Korean War. It was a fortuitous meeting of hearts and minds. The two men had a common vision and struck up a friendship that was to last a lifetime.

Pastor Han, mild-mannered and frail, and hollowed by a long battle with tuberculosis, had narrowly escaped persecution after he refused to worship the Japanese emperor at a Shinto shrine. He had then pastored a large Presbyterian church in North Korea. But growing Communist persecution had forced him and many of his flock to abandon everything and flee south. They arrived in Seoul with little more than the clothes on their backs.

The man who would become known as "the shepherd of Korea" devoted his life to living simply, helping refugees and providing for widows, orphans, the hungry and homeless.

In late-night talks with Bob Pierce, the Korean pastor encouraged the

American evangelist to form a charity to address the appalling poverty of his nation's widows and orphan children. They jointly founded the Sunmyung Association (which was to become World Vision) and worked together to change the world.

Dr Pierce's daughter, Marilee Pierce Dunker, said the two men had met "by God's design at a strategic time in history".

"As long as they lived, they loved each other like brothers," she said.

Marilee said they were "like Jonathan and David", the heroic figures of Israel who formed a covenant of friendship recorded in the Bible.

Returning to the US, Bob Pierce told the story of Pastor Han's work, and of White Jade and other needy children. He began raising funds to continue and expand his work supporting orphans. The strength of the public response was such that, in September 1950, World Vision was officially registered, with Bob Pierce as its first president.

He said the name World Vision came to him as he walked home one night after a meeting.

Ironically, Bob Pierce had been denied his dream to be an army chaplain in the 1940s because he had poor vision.

The earliest projects World Vision helped to fund were overseen by Pastor Han's Young Nak church. It would grow to be one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the world. The first project was establishing the Tabatha Widows' Home in South Korea. Small group homes for children soon followed.

And what became of White Jade, the Chinese girl who had inspired Bob Pierce?

In January 2010, Marilee Pierce Dunker, went to Amoy (now called Xiamen) hoping to uncover the fate of the courageous little girl who had touched her father's heart.

She knew that White Jade would now be in her late 70s if she was alive.

"The Search for White Jade" became one of the local Chinese media's most widely-covered stories, with Chinese reporters appealing in local newspapers for help in tracking her down.

Marilee met with some of Tena Holkeboer's former students and colleagues. But none could help her locate White Jade.

The little girl whose story would one day inspire millions to care about the future of one child was not found.

Marilee concluded: “We may never know what happened to White Jade on this side of heaven, but there is no doubt that God used her life to awaken Bob Pierce to the fact that God’s heart is broken over the suffering of even one little child, and that each of us is called to do something about it.”

2

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

NO, we can’t do that.” That was the immediate reaction in World Vision’s US headquarters when Bernard Barron first asked Bob Pierce

to open an office in Australia.

Bernard, then director of World Vision Canada, had first come to Australia on a 1962 tour with Gladys Aylward, the missionary to China whose story was told in the book The Small Woman and made into the hit film The Inn of the Sixth Happiness, starring Ingrid Bergman and Curt Jurgens.

At the time, Australian, British and New Zealand sponsors of World Vision were handled by the Canadian World Vision office. Bernard Barron was pleasantly surprised by the “genuine caring and generosity” of Australians when he was told that there was no such thing as a tax deduction for charitable donations.

This was the same nation described by visiting Reverend James Denny from Scotland in 1824 as “the most godless place under heaven”.

Bernard became convinced that a World Vision office should open in Australia.

It was not a popular view at the time. There was concern in the US office that the demands of world emergencies were out-stripping income. In fact, according to Ted Engstrom, World Vision’s then deputy-president: “In the early days of World Vision, we were bankrupt. I would call for a prayer meeting and we would pray from 11pm to 2am. And then in the morning, God provided the exact amount we needed.”

Bernard Barron was not deterred. “Each time I went down to the US office for a quarterly board of directors meeting, I would bring up the idea of World Vision starting an office in Australia,” he wrote in his unpublished

memoirs.

“At one of the meetings in 1965, Ted Engstrom drew me aside and cautioned me not to bring up the subject again. When I asked why, he said that it was beginning to irritate Bob Pierce because there was not enough funding to start an office there. I remember saying something to the effect that I had believed it my duty to mention it, but I would cease for now and leave it to God to open the door when the time was right.”

As a young university student in South Africa, Bernard Barron had been nicknamed “Mdengentonga” by elders of the Xhosa tribe. It means “The little man who, when he fights, is tall”.

It was an appropriate name for the passionate soul who was to become the founding head of World Vision Australia.

Bernard, the child of British migrants, grew up in the era of apartheid, the racist policy that governed relations between South Africa’s white minority and the non-white majority and sanctioned racial segregation and economic discrimination.

Apartheid dismayed him because his parents had taught him to respect people of all races and ethnic origins.

He wrote: “That black people entered our house through the front door was unacceptable to many of our neighbours and some ostracised us as ‘that English family’. They would let my parents know, ‘Blacks must always go round to the back door. Don’t let them into your house.’ This was a racism never known before by my parents and totally unacceptable to our family.”

Bernard had accepted a management role with World Vision in 1959 and quickly made his mark in what was then a small but fast-growing organisation. Two years later Bob Pierce chose Bernard to set up the new World Vision office in Canada.

They had a positive relationship but Bernard Barron joked that he wasn’t sure if Bob Pierce actually knew his name, because he always addressed him as “Buddy”.

In March 1966, the persistent Bernard finally got the go-ahead to plan the opening of an Australian World Vision office. At first, the plan was to site the Australian headquarters in Sydney. But Melbourne was eventually chosen because it was considered to be, at the time, the nation’s financial capital.

An office was found on the fourth floor of 380 Lonsdale Street. It wasn’t a

large office but it served the purpose – Bernard Barron said it was obtained for “a reasonable rental” – and World Vision Australia officially opened its doors on the cold Thursday morning of 11 August 1966.

The opening didn’t rate a mention in the media. But then again, there was a lot going on elsewhere.

At the time, Australia was experiencing dramatic social change.

The first baby boomers were reaching maturity and challenging traditional values of their parents’ generation. These radical changes in society were reflected in the new fashions, hairstyles and pop music. And in politics.

In January that year, Sir Robert Menzies had announced that he was “weary” and quit as our longest-serving Prime Minister, handing over the top job to the much younger Harold Holt. Ironically, Menzies was to outlive Holt by nearly a decade.

Holt, who remarked that Australia was being “jolted by events into adulthood”, used his first prime ministerial statement to announce the relaxation of the White Australia policy that had blocked the entry of non-European migrants for 65 years. This was to open the door for agencies such as World Vision when Asian refugees, particularly those escaping Vietnam after the Indochina war, searched for a new home.

In February, we had converted our currency from pounds, shillings and pence to dollars and cents and Victoria finally ended six o’clock closing of pubs.

The first Australian conscripts had left in April to fight in the Vietnam War – the first war in which Australia fought without Britain. The anti-war and anti-conscription protests were gradually rising in passion and strength.

In June that year, Opposition leader Arthur Calwell was shot by a 19-year-old student after addressing an anti-conscription rally at Mosman Town Hall in Sydney.

A month later, Harold Holt visited the White House to tell President Lyndon Johnston we would go “all the way with LBJ”, leading to a barrage of criticism from the Australian press and Labor Party, deriding Holt for embarrassing the nation with such a “crass expression of obsequiousness”.

About 200 Aboriginal stockmen walked off the Lord Vesty-owned Wave Hill cattle station in what turned out to be the beginning of Australia’s land rights movement.

And in Adelaide, the three Beaumont children disappeared in a mystery that endures today.

The miniskirt had arrived, as did Bob Dylan for his first Australian tour, and Prince Charles was enrolled at Australia's Timbertop School for a year. The Beach Boys' psychedelic tour de force Good Vibrations dominated play on transistor and car radios. Parties were extremely popular where dances like the twist, the stomp and the boogaloo were performed.

There were sporadic brawls in the capital city streets between long-haired "mods" and short-haired "sharpies" wearing baggy trousers.

At the other end of the social spectrum were the hippies, who had become disillusioned by what they perceived to be the shallowness and materialism of contemporary society.

Amid this social chaos and change, World Vision Australia was officially born.

3

AN UNOFFICIAL START

ACTUALLY, World Vision Australia had started quietly and unofficially a few years earlier.

In Sydney, Vera and John Randall, a couple in their early 20s, had become aware of child sponsorship through the World Vision US magazine they subscribed to and, in 1962, signed up to sponsor a child named Jang Bong Jo in Korea.

The Randalls recognised that, in sponsoring Jang Bong Jo, they had the opportunity to live out their faith in a practical way and decided to present the same opportunity to like-minded people across Sydney.

They told friends, mostly members of Castle Hill Baptist Church, and many also became sponsors of children in Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines and South America.

"We were involved in what people today call networking," said Vera. "I realised there are two ways of fundraising – asking and not asking – and asking always works best."

Vera and John set up an unofficial World Vision home-office, sourcing promotional materials, child sponsorship brochures and magazines from

World Vision in the US.

“We literally turned our third bedroom into a World Vision office, brought in an IBM typewriter, and I’m fairly creative, so I cut and pasted pamphlets,” said Vera.

“I don’t think World Vision in the US was really aware of what we were doing at the time. But, for us, it was important work.

“I grew up in a Christian family and was very committed to my belief system. I hadn’t seen the mission of the Church in the area of social justice. So this was my first glimpse of the opportunity to do something I felt was carrying out what we were commissioned to do. I love the words of St Francis – ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel. If necessary, use words.’

“That was the beginning of a really important spiritual journey for me.”

The Randalls advertised the World Vison child sponsorship program in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, using their address and phone number as the call to action.

Vera followed up enquiries, initially by phone then home visits – usually in the evening.

Within two years, they had recruited more than 40 child sponsors around Sydney.

John and Vera Randall invited people to donate or make clothes to send to the orphans in Korea. Their friend Arthur Marsh’s home garage became the depot for these clothes, which were then boxed and sent to Korea on behalf of World Vision.

Arthur was a milkman and told customers on his daily rounds about the work of World Vision. If they seemed interested he pointed them to John and Vera.

After the Melbourne office opened, World Vision provided the couple with a movie projector, films, books and other resources.

Vera accepted invitations to speak and show World Vision movies at churches, women’s groups and in schools across Sydney.

Bernard Barron praised the Randalls for their enthusiasm and working “whole-heartedly” at gaining new sponsors. “This was tantamount to having a regional office, even though both of them were working for their living

expenses and first home-buyers' house mortgage."

The Randalls eventually signed up hundreds of sponsors of children in South Korea and Vietnam; and campaigned to have crutches and wheelchairs shipped to Vietnam for soldiers who had lost limbs.

Vera Randall was to become the inaugural Australian Business Woman of the Year in 1979 and founder of the hugely popular sewing franchise Knitwit.

In 1967, the Randalls paid their own way for a trip to Vietnam, Korea, Japan and the Philippines to see the work of World Vision.

"We wanted to reassure people that their money was used wisely and to collect firsthand information from the projects that people were supporting. I was very impressed with World Vision's work in each country we visited."

The couple also had a life-changing meeting with World Vision founder Bob Pierce at a Tokyo railway station.

"He was in Tokyo at the same time as we were – that was what I call one of God's coincidences. The only place we could get together at the same time was at the railway station. We sat on the bench and chatted generally and he was such a beautiful humble man."

During their time together, Dr Pierce prayed the words he'd written in his Bible: "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God."

"He prayed it a number of times and I asked him why," said Vera. "He said, 'Because I don't want to ever forget it.' That's been my prayer ever since. It was very moving and it's still with me today like it was yesterday."

4

THE FIRST ONE AT WORK

WORLD Vision Australia's first employee at the new Melbourne office was a remarkable woman named Jean Philip. Bored with her job at an insurance office, she had answered an advertisement for the position of assistant to Bernard Barron. At the time, she was 48 years old and knew nothing about World Vision.

"I took a lift to this big empty floor, except for one little group of rooms down the end," she recalled. "That was the World Vision office. I met Bernard and was sold. I was so enthralled with what World Vision was doing to change lives and I wanted to be a part of it. On the way home in the train, I prayed to get the job."

Jean got the job and was to work for World Vision Australia for two decades.

Bernard and Jean worked together as the World Vision office for several months before others were employed. While Bernard was interstate showing films in churches and public places, Jean was transferring the records of Australian donors and sponsors from Canada, arranging film screenings of World Vision documentaries and keeping the office running.

Potential sponsors inspired by the World Vision films came to the Lonsdale Street office to choose a child from a book of photographs. Each of the early employees at World Vision Australia volunteered to sponsor children.

"Everybody who came to work there in those early years loved it," said Jean. "We all felt we were really doing something important."

One early major World Vision project was the screening of the film *Vietnam Profile*, an 80-minute colour documentary made by Bob Pierce in Vietnam portraying "the drama of God at work in the midst of war".

There was an amazing and surprising response immediately.

"I had not counted on the large protest demonstrations that would accompany these initial screenings," said Bernard.

"I had understood that there was some opposition by the Australian public to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War but I had not realised how widespread this protest was, particularly among young people. At some of the early demonstrations there was even a police presence.

“My plan was to seek out those who were the leaders of each demonstration and invite them and their close colleagues to first of all view the film and then give me their reactions and honest comments. In every instance there was immediate endorsement and whole-hearted support for what World Vision was doing.”

Bernard’s loyal assistant Jean Philip was later sent to the London office to promote World Vision’s work in Europe. She became an unlikely smuggler.

In the 1980s, when Jean was already a silver-haired grandmother in her 60s, she went to Communist-controlled Poland, a regime suspicious of aid agencies.

“They wanted to get in a film showing World Vision’s work but the Polish Government wouldn’t have approved,” said Jean. “So I said I’d take it in. I put the big film canister in the bottom of my suitcase and put all my clothes over the top.

“It was a dicey thing to do I suppose.”

Jean arrived at the Polish airport to find the customs hall encircled by a balcony with many armed guards checking out the arriving passengers.

“It was a pretty frightening experience but I got through the customs check without a problem,” she said. “Outside I was still feeling a bit rattled so I put down my case and waited for the man who was coming to pick me up.

“He arrived and I was relieved. When we arrived at the hotel he said, ‘Where’s your case?’ Would you believe it? I’d left the case with the film at the airport.”

A call to the airport revealed the case had been found. An official said Jean would have to come and collect it personally.

She was ushered into the office of the chief of customs.

As she entered, Jean noticed the uniformed official was eating an ice-cream, which he placed half-eaten into his top drawer.

“He said, ‘Is this your case?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ He then asked me to check that nothing had been removed and looked over my shoulder as I peered into the case. I felt the film canister but stayed cool.

“I knew this official was probably thinking about his ice-cream so I thanked him, smiled and shook hands, then walked out the door. Outside, I breathed a sigh of relief.

“I think the melting ice-cream was the reason he didn’t check my case and let me go so easily.”

5

SIGNING UP THE PM

WITH characteristic boldness, Bernard Barron wrote a letter to then-Prime Minister Harold Holt late in 1967, telling him of World Vision's work and requesting a meeting.

A week later, Holt's secretary rang to say the Prime Minister was interested in child sponsorship and asked Bernard Barron to select a Korean child for him to sponsor, preferably one he could write to.

World Vision's Korean office promptly sent back a photograph and case history of Kyung Sook, a little girl who was a singer at the World Vision Music Institute and would be delighted to be sponsored by the Prime Minister of Australia.

"We prepared the necessary documentation and I decided that the very next week I would make an appointment with the Prime Minister's office – hopefully I would get to see him this time," wrote Bernard. "Unfortunately, it was not to be."

That very weekend, on the Sunday, Harold Holt went to his favourite swimming spot at Cheviot Beach, near Portsea, and drowned.

"This presented a problem because I did not think we should give this particular sponsorship to the next applicant sponsor since it was a special assignment," said Bernard. "In discussing it with my wife, she suggested we should sponsor the orphan girl and our children could begin to write to her. It seemed a good idea, since we had no girl in our little family and we were hesitant to have another child and produce perhaps a fourth boy."

So the little girl who was to have been sponsored by the Australian PM became part of Bernard Barron's family.

6

"A FRAIL BUT PROMISING BOAT"

AFTER setting up the World Vision office in Melbourne, Bernard Barron quickly recruited a board of directors from his contacts.

Among the first were the Rev Geoffrey Fletcher, a former flying instructor for the RAAF and well-known evangelist who was later to become a foundation

board member of World Vision International, and Robert Coles, from the well-known Coles variety store and supermarket chains, who was already sponsoring a child in Vietnam. They were later joined by Bruce Ogden from Sydney and businessman Ian Harvey.

“I remember going to one of Bernard’s gatherings where he talked about World Vision,” said Robert Coles. “He was quite charismatic and met quite a few different people in a rather short time. I don’t know how he selected the board or for what reasons he chose me. He probably wanted some people with names and Coles wasn’t a bad name to be associated with. And, of course, Geoff Fletcher was a well-known evangelist.

“I remember the first unofficial board meeting in Singapore in 1968. It was during an evangelical congress and was almost an informal gathering to meet Stan [Mooneyham], who was going to become president of World Vision US.

“We met for breakfast and I think that more or less kicked off the board. We were called to be directors but we had no positions. So there were four of us. Geoff Fletcher was asked to be secretary, Bruce Ogden treasurer and then someone said, ‘You’d better be chairman,’ so I became the chairman. It was all very informal but that’s what happened.”

Geoff Fletcher was later to become chairman of the board.

“I think obviously Bernard Barron knew he was going to be here for a limited time,” said Robert Coles. “Once he set up the board, Bernard’s job was over and he had to hand over to someone else.”

Also at that first Singapore meeting was Graeme Irvine, a young YMCA director from Adelaide who was soon to succeed Bernard Barron as World Vision Australia’s director. Irvine went on not only to lead World Vision Australia through extraordinary growth and change but ultimately to serve as World Vision’s international president.

In the weeks before he left Australia, Bernard Barron would spend lunch breaks with Graeme Irvine, sharing his impressions and observations, country by country, of the needs and World Vision’s responses to those needs. From time to time he would reveal some of his deep-felt observations.

One of these was his belief that the work of Bob Pierce was a new landmark in Christian humanitarian concern for people in the less

developed countries of the world and where natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanoes and wars took lives and caused much suffering. One of Bernard's wishes was to see World Vision move on to a phase of not merely emergency response, but assisting in fostering self-subsistence in all the developing nations spread around the world to whom World Vision ministered.

Bernard Barron's observations were prophetic.

In the 1970s, World Vision was to embrace a broader community development model and established an emergency relief division. The organisation also sought to address the causes of poverty by focusing on community needs such as water, sanitation, education, health, leadership training and income generation.

The new World Vision Australia office expanded quickly to meet the needs of refugees in Indochina as well as assisting those affected by disasters in Bangladesh and several countries in Africa. Many average Australians began to sponsor children to help provide long-term assistance.

When Graeme Irvine took over, he was to write that he found himself "at the helm of a frail but promising boat on its maiden voyage".

Soon after Bernard Barron's departure, during a visit to Sydney, Graeme said he was "feeling the weight of all that lay ahead".

Finding himself in Wesley Chapel in the heart of Sydney, he knelt in silence and had a vision of the vast island continent of Australia.

"I saw in my imagination its 12 million people. I felt the youthful energy of the country, its fierce belief in a fair go for all. I knew in that moment that World Vision had a significant future in Australia. A great sense of peace and assurance flooded my soul. God had opened a door of opportunity beyond my imagining."

"Graeme was an amazing person and he worked very hard," said Robert Coles. "He was dedicated to the idea of Christian international aid and so passionate about the work. Child sponsorship ballooned under Graeme's leadership.

"The board met in half-day meetings and we always prayed at the beginning and end of the meetings. The difficulty with all this work was, as a group, to control the overheads. We struggled with it but our prayers were always answered."

Graeme Irvine was later to write in his annual report to World Vision headquarters in the US: “Many times we felt like a canoeist riding a torrent – exhilarated, sometimes almost overwhelmed, always moving forward. We now marvel at the distance covered. And we acknowledge that the force carrying us along was not our own, but the strong Holy Spirit working in a thousand unseen ways.”

7

AN ORIGINAL CHILD SPONSOR

DIANA Roper was one of the first World Vision Australia child sponsors. In fact, she started sponsoring a child in Korea five years before the Australian office opened.

She saw a story in an overseas Christian magazine about Bob Pierce and became convinced that she should sponsor an orphan child. For several years, from 1961, she sponsored Yoon Chung Ho through World Vision’s Canadian office, then through the newly-formed World Vision Australia.

“My husband and I thought that if everybody sponsored one orphan – everyone in the world that had a reasonable income – we would make the world a better place,” she said. “So we did it.”

Diana’s family went on to sponsor other children in the Philippines, India and Zimbabwe. She currently sponsors two children in India and Nicaragua. Her children also now sponsor through World Vision.

“It’s been a great blessing for our family all these years,” she said. “As our children grew up and they saw the letters coming in, and the photos, we were able to talk to them about being an extended Christian family. It’s become a family tradition.

“I remember way back when my mother was knitting jumpers for my children and she also knitted one for our World Vision child. We were thrilled when a photo came back of little Yoon Chung Ho wearing that green jumper.

“We were just very impressed with the whole set-up because we thought it taught people a whole lot about being a Christian – that you just can’t sit around and talk and discuss Third World poverty; you have to actually do something. So we promoted it in our parish and lots of people embraced that.”

Diana and her husband lived in Malaysia for two years and Diana taught school in Tanzania and in Russia. They also visited Thailand several times.

The overseas experiences helped her understand the reality of poverty.

“When you live among it, you really understand it,” she said. “We’re the blessed, even the poorest of us. I have a diagram of world poverty and it shows that all the people in Australia, even the poorest of us in Australia are up in the top 10 percent. So people here when they say they’re having a struggle, they don’t really know what struggle is.

“Even if you’re on a pension, you’re still in the top 10 percent of the world. When people complain about everything, it makes my heart ache. They have so much.

“I remember long ago someone told me this story – ‘I heard about children living in poverty so we formed a committee, then we prayed about it and sang songs about it but no one did anything.’ It breaks your heart doesn’t it?

“I believe as a Christian you have to be the gospel. You have to do the gospel, not just talk about it or think about it. You have to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world wherever he places you.

“World Vision paved the way for all the other organisations. You know, they were the first in the game – in this field – and they have been a wonderful model and they’ve stood the test of time.”

FAITH is in the heart of Bernice Watts, a remarkable World Vision supporter who even used her tea bags twice to help save the money that would enable her to visit her sponsored child in a place she’d never heard of.

She didn’t know where Lesotho – the high altitude, landlocked kingdom encircled by South Africa – was. But she promised herself she would one day go there to meet the child Seppo.

Bernice finally honoured her promise at the age of 79.

“My trip to Lesotho was the most remarkable thing I’ve done in my life, especially at my age,” she said.

“I thought I had missed out because I’ve known Seppo since I started sponsoring him at the age of four and I’d known him for more than 10 years. He had become part of my family with my four children. To finally meet him was just wonderful.”

The beautiful relationship between Bernice and Seppo started in an Australian supermarket.

"There was a World Vision girl in the foyer and she had a lot of photos and asked me: 'Can you help?'

"I stopped in my tracks and said, 'Help with what?'

"She pointed to the photos and said, 'All these children need help.' What was I to do?"

As Bernice gazed at the photos, one of a little boy in the third row, third from the left, "jumped out" at her.

"I didn't select him; he selected me," said Bernice. "I thought, 'Why not?'

"I had my own money and I worked hard. I thought surely I can help to support a young boy in Lesotho. I had not even heard of the country before. And a lot of people even today when I speak about Lesotho say they'd never heard of it."

Bernice, who was a nurse, slowly saved enough money to finance the trip to see her sponsored child.

"My family thought it was a bit much for me to do at my age. I should have done it years ago but the opportunity didn't come up. Because I was busy saving my money towards this trip."

On her way to Lesotho, she had had some trouble getting through South Africa because the world soccer championship was on.

"I was stopped by a very large man in a white uniform who searched my bag and I missed my flight. I finally got into a little plane and made it to Lesotho."

She described the people of Lesotho as "very friendly and warm".

"They don't have very much but what they do have to give you is love and you can't help but love them, especially the little children. They are so gorgeous.

"And there are so many of them that live up in the mountains that is called the kingdom in the sky and there are so many children living up there in poor circumstances who do need help.

"When we got to where Seppo lives, World Vision went out of their way to find him for me.

"They said, 'Would you recognise Seppo?' and I said, 'Yes, of course.' He

had a pair of pants on that were obviously someone else's and he had a shirt with only one button that would do up. We put our arms around each other and we both had a good cry. It was wonderful.

"The World Vision lady asked if I would like to meet Seppo's mother. I said, 'Yes.'

"I walked into this round tank-shaped building made out of stones gathered from around the area stuck together with mud, water, grass and donkey poop and that is the wall of the building.

"The World Vision lady showed me into one of the buildings. I had to adjust my eyesight because it was very dim. And on the dirt floor was a bundle of blankets – rags really. I held out my hand towards the bundle of blankets and a very scrawny hand came out. When she put her hand in the palm of my hand it felt like a butterfly landing and that was her last heartbeat.

"She passed away. I think she held on until I got there. She wanted to know who I was and that I would look after her son.

"It was very hard for me because I had to keep it to myself. I couldn't go out and tell her family she had passed away. I didn't sleep very much that night."

Bernice said meeting Seppo was the most rewarding thing she has done in her life.

"I will never forget it. Seppo eventually went to live in another city and we lost contact. But I know we will never forget each other."

THE 1970s

This was the decade of the Munich Olympics and Jonestown massacres, the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island and the deadliest earthquake of the century in China. Star Wars hit the movie theatres and disco was king. In Australia, daylight saving was introduced, Billy McMahon, Gough Whitlam and Malcom Fraser became Prime Ministers and the Sydney Opera House opened.

World Vision Australia became a dominant presence in the nation's NGO community. Donations continued to grow and sponsorship shifted to community development – for the benefit of all children. World Vision's quiet involvement in microenterprise development also began. Relief efforts expanded to Laos and even behind enemy lines in war-torn Cambodia. The fall of Indochina to Communist rule forced offices and

several crucial World Vision Australia programs to close in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, affecting 23,000 sponsored children. World Vision rushed to the aid of orphans and Vietnamese refugees stranded at sea.

8

A PRICELESS GIFT

IN 1971, a group of little Korean choristers with bell-like voices came to Australia and lifted the profile of World Vision Australia to a new height.

The tour by the Korean Children's Choir, formed by World Vision in 1960, was widely publicised and the packed audiences were deeply moved by the children's sweet voices and amazing testimonies. Seeing their joyful faces and hearing their songs of hope, it was sobering for many in the audiences to realise that some of the children might not have survived if it had not been for World Vision sponsorship.

The Australian media gave enormous coverage to the concerts and to World Vision's ministry.

Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision, accompanied the kids during some of their travels. They called him "aboji", which means "father" in Korean. They were often photographed climbing on his shoulders and swinging from his arms.

The choir had toured the world extensively. They sang at the Taj Mahal in India, at the White House, the United Nations, and performed for King Olav of Norway and Madame Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan.

When they performed at Carnegie Hall in New York, 4,000 people had to be turned away. There were so many people waiting outside that the choir had to schedule a second concert.

Several of the 24 girls and eight boys who toured Australia were orphans, and all were sponsored through the World Vision childcare program and all lived at the World Vision Music Institute in Seoul.

The youngest choir member, Oh Mee Soon (her name means "beautiful"), celebrated her ninth birthday during the Australian tour.

She had been left on a snow-covered street as a baby and a welfare worker on her way home from work heard her cry. The worker took Oh Mee Soon to a World Vision babies' home nearby.

World Vision Australia CEO Graeme Irvine interviewed the girl on stage and asked her to name her favourite Bible verse.

Oh Mee Soon quietly quoted the 23rd Psalm: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

Part of each choir concert on the Australian tour was a violin solo by remarkable 16-year-old Kim Yung Keun. The shy young violinist asked choir members to pray for him before each concert.

His personality and flawless playing won the hearts of Australian audiences.

During the tour, his old violin gave up the ghost.

During interval at one concert, Graeme Irvine shared the child’s problem with the audience. A technician handling the radio broadcast of the concert for Radio Australia was a widower whose wife had been a violinist with the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra. Since her death, he had refused to sell her beautiful instrument.

He could not contain his excitement when he heard Graeme Irvine’s appeal.

He now knew what he had to do. That night he presented the magnificent violin to the boy as a living memorial to his wife.

World Vision Australia board member Robert Coles later provided a scholarship for Kim Yung Keun to continue his musical studies with maestro Jascha Heifetz in the US.

A double live album of the choir in concert in Australia was released and became a hit. It was the first recording ever made by Korean artists in this country.

The Korean Children’s Choir returned to Australia in 1976 to surprise Graeme Irvine who was the subject of the TV show *This Is Your Life* with Mike Willesee.

On the program, it was announced that World Vision Australia supporters now sponsored 100,000 children. Hawthorn football captain Don Scott appeared on the show and made it 100,001.

9

LOST IN TRANSLATION

IT seemed like a good idea at the time.

When Australian Roger Walker was appointed World Vision director in

Thailand in 1973, he heard of a rat plague in the refugee camps.

“It was a terrible disease problem, so we decided something must be done,” said Roger. “Then we came up with what we thought was a bright idea. World Vision decided to pay a small cash amount for each rat tail that was handed in by the locals.”

The rat tails came in by the dozens. After six months, World Vision did a check on the rat population and found it had not diminished. In fact, it had exploded.

“We found out that people had started breeding rats so they could get a few cents for every tail,” said Roger. “You live and learn.”

Cultural differences and confusions abound in the world of NGOs such as World Vision. Almost every aid worker is confronted by them at times.

John Steward, who spent several years in World Vision’s Indonesian office, always carried an Indonesian sarong with him – “very nice to wear in humid areas after the evening shower”.

One evening in north Thailand, John had been resting in his sarong when he heard conversation in Indonesian in an adjoining room. He investigated and was greeted with a burst of laughter.

His Indonesian friends explained that they had just been talking with guests from other countries, who asked whether Indonesian men still wore sarongs.

The Indonesians had replied: “Only a few; only the more backward and primitive wear sarongs.” At that moment, sarong-clad John had walked in.

One of the many useful things World Vision has done in poorer communities is drilling wells for water. The World Vision crews follow tried-and-tested scientific principles to find the water.

“When we once asked the local villagers how they traditionally found wells, they said they consulted the local soothsayer, who killed a chicken, said some words, and then took them to a place where they should dig,” said former Australian CEO Philip Hunt.

After a year, World Vision reviewed its water finding program. Sure enough, the scientific method proved more effective in finding water than the dead-chicken method.

“When we asked the villagers what they thought about our superior results,

they responded, ‘Your soothsayers are better than ours,’” said Philip.

When Philip Hunt took over the Hong Kong office before becoming Australian CEO, he noticed that his staff members were sitting two or more to a desk.

“I thought they must feel cramped in those sorts of working conditions so I bought each of the staff members their own desk,” he said.

“They spent a day or two indulging me before they went back to sitting two at a desk. That’s the way they worked best.”

Years later, in a Rwandan general’s office, Philip Hunt used his study of other cultures to advantage.

“We wanted to visit a refugee camp and didn’t have the right papers according to the general,” said Philip. “Our technique, which is the same you use at airline counters when they say there aren’t enough seats, is to stand at the desk and wait for them to sort out the problem.

“They say, ‘You can go and sit over there,’ and you say, ‘No I’m fine I’ll just wait here.’ You’re in their faces and a problem for them.

“So in Rwanda, we just sat and waited and finally, after half a day, the general got tired of us and said, ‘Yes it’s all ok; you can go.’”

Philip tells the story of a young American woman reporter, with little understanding of cultural sensitivities, who attached herself to a World Vision convoy travelling through Uganda.

“She was the archetypal gauche reporter. She made Norman Gunston seem aware,” wrote Philip in his book *Journeys to Justice*.

“A Ugandan woman, daughter of a murdered judge, was describing the horror of the murder. The reporter took notes and kept asking breathlessly, ‘And then what happened?’

‘They took him outside.’

‘And then what happened?’

‘They took a machete and chopped off his arms.’

‘Yes, yes. And then what happened?’

‘They chopped his head off.’

‘Yes, yes. And then what happened?’

‘Well, he died, obviously.’

‘Oh, yes. I see ... And then what happened?’”

Philip said: “We thought it divine justice when her passport was stolen with her purse. Later her purse was retrieved from a pit latrine, but her passport was gone. To our shame, when we arrived back at Wilson Airport in Kenya, we all deserted her at immigration while she was trying to explain how her passport was lost in a toilet.

“The last words I heard were from the immigration official: ‘Yes. And then what happened…?’”

When working in the Sudan, field worker Keith Lancaster found that many of the Dinka people were convinced that injections were the only cure for a range of ailments. Tablets, regardless of colour, size or shape, were known locally to be “nothing more than aspirin”.

“One lady with a serious condition was sent to one of our clinics for treatment,” said Keith. “She complained afterwards that they didn’t help her. She was sent back to the clinic and again she complained that doctors didn’t do anything for her.

“Investigation revealed that she had been given tablets that would cure her condition. She had thrown the tablets away on each occasion, as she was convinced that they were nothing more than aspirin. She considered an injection to be the only valid treatment. She was encouraged to try tablets anyway and was soon cured.”

Dinkas are normally very tall and very thin. Yet, once a year there is a high-stakes contest in which these warriors of the White Nile battle to be the fattest in the land.

In the Fat Man competition, fit, healthy young men are chosen to represent their camps. They are fed exclusively on cows’ milk and become huge after several months of indulgence. The winner is the man who becomes the most obese. Some gorge themselves to death.

“A guy who won a recent competition died shortly after when his stomach ruptured,” said Keith Lancaster.

“According to Dinka custom, dying of excess milk consumption is an honourable death and they are given a grand funeral. The body was placed in a hole in the middle of an area where cattle were tethered and cow dung was piled on top. They gave him heaps.”

10

THE SAINT OF SAIGON

IN the final years of the Vietnam War, the Australian woman with the long blonde hair in her little car must have caused quite a stir on the streets of Saigon.

She was often seen, with one hand on the car horn, speeding late at night to a hospital with a sick baby on board.

This bold young woman was Joan Potter, formerly a paediatric nurse at Wagga Wagga Hospital, who had come to Vietnam in 1972 after answering an advertisement for a director of the New Life Babies' Home. The home, fully funded by World Vision Australia, was the first major overseas initiative under Graeme Irvine's leadership.

For three years, Joan and her dedicated band of Vietnamese nurses nursed and loved hundreds of Vietnamese children back to life and arranged the first adoptions of many Vietnamese orphans into families in Australia, Canada and the US.

As the war between South Vietnam and the North Vietnamese Communists escalated, Joan's orphanage was subjected to frequent mortar and rocket attacks.

"The kids were prone to chest infections and boils. They often died," she said. "At the time, it was very difficult. There was a war on and so many Vietnamese fathers were being killed and the mothers had no money to care for the children. Sometimes they would just leave the babies out in the street. And sometimes they would just poison them.

"Once we opened the gates and found two five-month-old twin babies, one dead and the other barely alive. Once, in a village, I found five dead babies. Their mother was so desperate she had poisoned their soup."

Towards the end of the Vietnam War, the orphanage cared for babies who had been born deformed after their mothers had been subjected to the effects of Agent Orange, a defoliant used by the US military.

Joan taught her staff to be genuine caregivers. She remembered when she first arrived, that the deprived infants left alone in cots were constantly banging their heads on the railings. She encouraged the nurses to play with the children, to talk to them and touch them. She arranged for little swings

to be sent from Australia so the children could play outside.

“The Vietnamese nurses were wonderful in looking after the children,” she said. “I had 60 staff looking after 86 babies under the age of two and it was so hard because many of the children the nurses cared for died. But then again, so many survived.

“We learned to cope because we had a job to do and we just got on with it. You couldn’t sit down and curl up in a mess.”

Joan’s heart almost broke during a measles epidemic that swept through Saigon in 1974, killing 55 of the babies at the orphanage.

“That was terrible and I nearly decided to come home,” said Joan. “I thought if they had been in Australia they could have been cared for. It made me so angry.”

Joan had to bargain with an undertaker to bury the babies in consecrated ground. “It cost me $75 for each child to be buried and I had to ask Australia for more money because the budget went berserk,” she said.

In 1973, Joan and World Vision had begun arranging the overseas adoptions of some of the orphans.

“We didn’t want to get into adoptions because we were working hard enough but, as the war escalated and the Communists came closer to Saigon, we realised that we would have to leave eventually.

“At the same time, a lot of people from Australia were writing to me wanting children. They wrote letters, which had to be translated into Vietnamese, and I would go right through them and I would look at the children I had available and check with their medical history to see whether they’d be suitable to fit in with that family.

“Then I’d go to the Vietnamese Ministry of Social Welfare and get back a document saying the adoption was accepted and I’d get a photograph and history of the child and send it to the family. If they still wanted to adopt, I’d get the family to send me back a photo of themselves and tell me a bit about themselves. I just chose families I thought would suit the babies we flew out to Australia.

“Often, when the families sent back a photo, the older children who were to be adopted would carry around the photo saying ‘this is my mother’ and ‘this is my father’.”

As the Communists neared Saigon, Hanoi Radio broadcast daily messages

that World Vision staff would be “spared no mercy” when the conquering heroes entered the South Vietnamese capital. The Australian Government ordered Joan to leave.

“We took badges off the nurses, logos off cars and the name off the babies’ home,” remembered Joan. “I felt awful leaving behind the nurses. They told me that they would take the remaining babies to their homes to look after.”

Two weeks before the end of the Vietnam War, more than 3,000 orphans were airlifted out of Saigon. Operation Babylift was the largest single act of adoption in history.

On 4 April 1975, Joan Potter was ordered to fly to the US on a massive Galaxy aircraft loaded with 243 babies, their escorts and medical staff. At the last minute, she was told that instead she would fly with more babies on a Hercules aircraft bound for Australia.

Soon after the American Galaxy took off, the plane’s rear cargo door blew off. The pilots tried to return to the runway but the stricken aircraft hit the ground, bounced over the Saigon River and exploded. There were few survivors. The dead included 143 babies and two Adelaide nurses who were friends of Joan.

Joan watched horrified as the plane fell out of the sky and exploded. “It was very traumatic,” she said. Soon after, her Australian flight took off loaded with babies – the older ones five to a litter and the smallest infants in cardboard boxes on the floor, all with water bottles between their lips to ease the pain of changing air pressure.

“We came through Singapore and offloaded there and a whole lot of nurses from various hospitals were feeding the babies milk. I never gave my travelling babies milk, only distilled water and diluted apple juice and never had a baby vomit. But then these babies who were fed milk got onto a Qantas plane and were vomiting everywhere.”

When Joan returned home she suffered a breakdown. “I couldn’t work or do much of anything for three months,” she said.

“But, if that war hadn’t have come and we hadn’t been forced out, I would have stayed. I loved the people.”

11

BABES ON A PLANE

TWO years before Operation Babylift, on a cold August morning in 1973, four orphan babies were quietly airlifted from World Vision's New Life Babies Home in Saigon to Australia.

The Vietnamese babies, most suffering from some illness or stress, were immediately adopted into the arms of their waiting Australian families.

Only one of the children made news when the plane arrived at Tullamarine Airport in Melbourne from war-ravaged Vietnam on 24 August 1973.

A photo of Tuyet White, 13, made the front page of *The Sun* when she was reunited with her older sister Ngyet, who was living in Melbourne with her serviceman husband. Her arrival was used to divert media from the arrival of the four babies – named Kym, Melody, Tai and Eric – who left via a back door.

On the 15-hour flight from Saigon, the babies' home director Joan Potter and 13-year-old Tuyet fed the babies bottled water with glucose and frequently changed nappies.

The baby named Kym had been only a few days old when abandoned in a Saigon street. A stranger found the seriously ill baby and rushed him to hospital. He ended up in the World Vision orphanage.

Meanwhile, a South Australian couple, Uniting Church minister David Purling and his wife Judith, had already spent two long years battling "red tape" and lobbying governments and aid agencies in their hope to adopt an orphaned Vietnamese baby.

The Purlings already had two biological daughters: Rebecca, then six, and Catherine, four. They adopted Kym sight unseen, on the strength of a photograph sent from Vietnam.

With the help of World Vision, Kym was to become one of the first Vietnamese orphans to be officially adopted in Australia.

The process wasn't easy.

"When we first decided to adopt a Vietnamese orphan, the Australian Government at the time didn't really want to know anything about these children," said Judith Purling. "After Gough Whitlam came to power, we wrote to the new immigration minister Al Grasby and received a positive response. It didn't take long after that.

"In South Australia, the department of community welfare was most helpful but the department in Victoria made things very difficult and threatened the

parents that, if there was any publicity when the babies arrived, they'd stop any more adoptions.

"[World Vision Australia director] Graeme Irvine picked me up and when we got to the airport we were ushered into a private room to wait with the other mothers. When Joan and the older girl came out with the babies we all burst into tears. It was a very emotional moment."

On arrival, Kym was eight-and-a-half months old and weighed only 12 pounds. He was very sick and undernourished. But he thrived in his new family.

Kym Purling's musical life began at the age of three, when friends of the family had observed that he could sing in reasonably perfect pitch. A couple of years later, he showed prodigious musical talent by playing tunes by ear on the piano, mimicking the songs his sister was practising. At the age of six, he began formal classical training and later formed his own jazz trio.

Kym Purling, now based in the US, was to become an acclaimed recording and performance artist who has opened concerts for artists such as Julio Iglesias, James Morrison and the Ray Brown Trio and performed with the likes of David Helfgott. He has been musical director for numerous musicals around the world.

The baby Melody, now a talented singer, was adopted by the Hayes family in Victoria. They lived in Mildura and then the Solomon Islands before returning to Australia.

She said she knew "fairly early on" about her history. "Mum and Dad always talked about it and there were newspaper clippings about the story so I don't remember ever not being aware of it. When people asked me where I was from I would always say 'Vietnamese' but I felt a bit odd around Vietnamese people because I could not speak the language."

Melody worked with World Vision Australia in telemarketing for two years. "That was a nice connection to have after being in the World Vision babies' home in Saigon," she said.

She visited Vietnam and tracked down the orphanage but found no records of her birth parents.

As they grew up, the four orphan babies from Saigon wondered what had happened to the others. All had a strange feeling that they would find each other again.

Melody managed to contact the others and discovered that all of them had become professional or semi-professional musicians.

In 2006, Kym, Melody, Tai and the older girl Tuyet met up in Melbourne, 33 years after they were evacuated from Vietnam. It was an amazing and joyful meeting.

“We call each other sister and brother now because we are all part of a unique story,” said Melody. “We are all part of what is essentially one family.”

PAUL Gauci migrated from Malta to Australia in 1960 with the equivalent of $5 in his pocket and dreams of becoming a success.

He married Mary, worked hard as a builder in Wollongong and started a business in the building industry that grew rapidly.

Paul and Mary were always generous and donated to many charities, both locally and internationally. When hearing of the work of World Vision, they were impressed and decided to sponsor 33 World Vision children.

“I don’t know why the number 33 came into my father’s head but that’s what he decided,” said their daughter Carmen Rudd. “It was always 33 children he wanted to sponsor.”

Paul and Mary both passed away in 1999 but today their children and grandchildren continue their parents’ and grandparents’ legacy through the Gauci Family Trust, which continues to sponsor 33 World Vision children in nations including Bangladesh, Vietnam, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Tanzania, Guatemala, Honduras, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, India, Zambia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Senegal and Rwanda.

“As we were growing up, there was always a desire in the family to give back,” said Carmen. “The more successful my father became, the more generous he became. He had that philosophy of the more you receive, the more you should give. He lived by that.”

The family now owns 21 serviced apartments in Wollongong and in each room is a photo of a sponsored child and information on World Vision’s work around the globe.

“We’ve had guests from around the world and they love the feeling that they are staying in a place that has a commitment to children overseas. Our staff love it too because they feel part of the commitment.”

Carmen is also sponsoring two World Vision children in India and is planning to take her family to Cambodia where she wants to fund micro

business and help to combat child trafficking.

"Our father was supportive of many charities but had a real passion for World Vision. It is a fantastic organisation that works in so many communities."

12

OPERATION SEASWEEP

FOLLOWING the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists in 1975, tens of thousands refugees fled the nation in small, often unseaworthy boats down the Mekong River and into the South China Sea.

Many perished in the treacherous sea or were robbed, raped or killed by Thai pirates, sometimes armed with radar and modern weapons.

Those who made it to land in nations such as Malaysia were often stopped at gunpoint, towed out to sea again and cut loose.

A preacher friend of Stan Mooneyham, then president of World Vision US, shoved a photo in his face of a Vietnamese mother cowering under a canvas in the bow of a little boat. The friend asked Mooneyham what he was going to do about the Vietnamese refugees.

"I tried to evade the responsibility," recalled Stan. "But it haunted me."

Stan said he made all kinds of excuses. It was too big a problem. Too much politics involved. It would cost millions which he didn't have. And most convincing of all, "Why me?"

"But to get him off my back, I said I would look at the problem and pray about it.

"Agreeing to pray was mistake number one. I couldn't get the boat people out of my heart."

Stan Mooneyham approached five governments, including Australia, in Southeast Asia, the US and the United Nations with the idea of a mercy ship and all officially discouraged him.

He said one Australian official he approached said of the boat people, "Don't give them enough gas to get here."

Stan headed to Canberra in May 1978. He told our politicians – and anyone else who would listen – that the Vietnamese boat people were like a baby threatening to arrive while in a taxi on the way to hospital.

He said it was no good an expectant mother shouting at the baby to wait until they reached hospital. It was equally pointless telling the boat people to hang on until the world had prepared itself for their resettlement.

Something had to be done now.

Stan took the problem to his World Vision colleagues. He wanted the organisation to act by buying and equipping its own boat to save the boat people fleeing Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

The board voted no. The board members and senior staff all thought the idea was preposterous – too costly and without precedent.

Dean Hirsch, later to become president of World Vision International, recalled: “I sat alongside the wall and watched the deliberations and everyone voted no.”

Harold Henderson, then CEO of World Vision Australia, said: “There was a feeling that hiring out a boat was spending too much money and we were getting into areas that had ramifications.”

Against all advice, Stan Mooneyham, fearless when on a mission, raised half a million dollars for the operation.

The first boat he bought was an old vessel unsuited to the South China Sea. The second ship was not much better.

World Vision then purchased a 1,500-tonne freighter from an Australian firm and converted it into a rescue ship with facilities for a medical team, mechanics and interpreters. With a crew led by a naval veteran, the ship was renamed Seasweep.

It took World Vision four months to obtain registration for Seasweep because no nation wanted the ship to fly under its flag. It was eventually registered by the Honduras Government.

“I felt that I had sailed, not marched, off the map when we were in Singapore harbour and a half a dozen countries threatened everything but my life if we sailed our rescue vessel Seasweep out onto the South China Sea to help drowning refugees,” said Stan.

“All in the course of one day, 24 hours, the Honduran Government cancelled our registration; the Indonesian Navy tried to run us down with a gunboat; the Singapore Government threatened never to let our doctors and nurses practice there again; the Hong Kong Marine Department radioed we would be fined $50,000 (I never found out if that was US or

Hong Kong dollars) if we sailed into their territorial waters; and the Prime Minister of Malaysia went on BBC foreign service and called me every name he could think of, except one or two which must have been too offensive for children's ears.

"In those moments of desperation when you are nose-to-nose with God and you're sailing – or marching off the map – you go to God in prayer."

Seasweep set sail on 6 July 1979. It was typhoon season and no-one really knew whether the ship could handle the weather. For several weeks, Seasweep, carrying a bright flashing beacon atop its forward mast to make it easily visible to other ships and avoid collisions, sailed in vain. The crew stood watch in four-hour shifts because the refugee boats rarely carried lights and could be easily missed in the darkness.

Then a speck appeared in the distance.

It was Seasweep's first encounter with those who had been the focus of so many prayers.

The World Vision plan was originally just to resupply the refugee boats with fuel, food and water.

But the crew realised that the boat on the horizon was badly damaged – irreparable – and the refugees were unlikely to survive if left to their own devices.

Seasweep picked up the boatload of 55 Vietnamese, originally part of a larger group of 289 people who left Vietnam. Soon after leaving Vietnam, they had been robbed by Thai pirates of everything except a few personal belongings such as rings or earrings. When they reached Malaysia, the Malay army tried to turn them away. The refugees got to the beach and begged on their knees to stay. They pulled off what little jewellery remained and gave it to the Malay soldiers. The solders took the jewellery but pushed the small craft back into the ocean.

The refugees said they knew they had no more than a 50 percent chance of reaching freedom, but they would rather die and have their families perish than have to live in what they considered slavery.

Seasweep was the first international rescue ship to provide food and medical care to stranded refugees. For months, Operation Seasweep was the lone prophetic voice in that watery wilderness, but ultimately the voice was heard.

Within two years, the world was shamed by the boldness of World Vision's leadership and the US Navy, France, Germany and Norway were picking up these refugees.

The Italian Navy sent three ships but couldn't find any refugees. An Italian admiral radioed Seasweep and asked if the crew had any refugees. The admiral said: "Would you please transfer them to our vessel because we don't dare go home without some refugees?" A vote was held and the refugees all voted no.

The Malaysians did the Italian admiral a favour. They loaded 800 refugees into a number of old boats that had already been beached, towed them out to sea and gave them to the Italian Navy. The admiral sailed home in triumph and victory.

Seasweep was a pivotal moment in World Vision's history, and put the organisation into a whole different realm in terms of advocacy. Former World Vision Australia CEO Harold Henderson said: "I think World Vision played an important role in changing public opinion in relation to Indochina."

"Both the US and Australian leadership of World Vision were initially against buying Seasweep," said Ian Curtis, deputy director of World Vision Singapore at the time. "But Stan went ahead and did it anyway. Six months later, they all agreed he had done the right thing."

Dave Toycen, who was later communications director for World Vision Australia, described the Seasweep initiative as "probably the most dramatic and unpopular thing World Vision has ever done".

"What was so powerful about it was that it changed the conversation. We didn't directly save by our ship thousands of refugees. We actually weren't able to rescue that many, but it embarrassed other countries to do something. That was the greatest achievement of the initiative."

13

DEFYING THE ODDS AT SEA

BATONG Pham was 11 when his family fled Vietnam in an unseaworthy 10-metre long by three-metre wide fishing boat that carried 75 passengers seeking freedom.

On the second night of that desperate journey, the boat was hit by a terrific storm.

“We all thought we were going to die,” said Batong. “The Catholics were praying the ‘Our Father’ to Jesus and ‘Hail Mary’ to Mary, Mother of God, while the Buddhists were praying to Buddha seeking divine intervention.

“We thought we had all reached the end of our journey. In our search for freedom, we did not know what we were heading for.”

The boat continued for a week and a half until the prayers were answered in a mysterious way.

The World Vision ship Seasweep slowly appeared off the coast of Malaysia and rescued the refugees. “It was a great relief to see that ship,” said Batong.

“They transferred all the boat people onto the bigger ship and looked after us well.”

Shortly after the rescue, the old fishing boat sank.

At that time, under an international water agreement, the ship could not take them to shore. World Vision then purchased another vessel in Malaysia that was safe enough to take them to shore.

Batong and the others were taken to the refugee camp on the east coast of Malaysia.

“It was only then that we realised how people sacrifice their lives in search of freedom and democracy, for many people never made it to shore or to freedom,” said Batong, who was born in a small town called Ba Ria, which is 16 kilometres from Long Tan, where a famous battle was fought and won by Australian troops. “We were fortunate to reach the shores of Malaysia, for many others never made it to shore.”

At a refugee camp, Batong’s family was interviewed by the United Nations and were given a clean bill of health as genuine refugees.

Five months later, they finally arrived in Australia.

“It was only when we stood on Australian soil that we realised we were out of danger,” said Batong.

Batong became a market gardener and then became interested in politics.

Thirty years after being saved by the World Vision ship, Batong Pham became the first Vietnamese-born person to be elected to the West Australian Parliament.

In his maiden speech to Parliament he said: “My journey to this place has

been a remarkable one. As the first person of Vietnamese origin to stand in this place, I am extremely proud of my cultural heritage."

Crossing the sea in such desperate circumstances proved to be just one of the hurdles that have marked his life.

In July 2007, he suffered a brain aneurism. Defying the odds, the wheelchair-bound Pham continued to serve his electorate and gave a speech telling his amazing story.

His proud father would wheel him to Parliament and wait for his son to finish work before accompanying him home.

14

ESCAPE FROM THE COMMUNISTS

LIEN Walker worked as a translator with an Australian medical team in Vietnam before becoming sponsorship manager for World Vision in Saigon until the city fell to the Communists in 1975. She escaped Vietnam as a refugee, after six failed attempts. Settling in Australia, she worked for World Vision Australia.

The rapidity with which the Communists took over in April 1975 surprised almost everyone, including Lien.

Communications between the outside world and Saigon were cut and there was panic in the streets.

At the World Vision office, located next to the US embassy, staff members were ordered to remove all name plaques from their desks and to destroy all print-out lists of names and addresses of overseas supporters.

"The country was in turmoil and very soon everyone wanted to get out of the city," recalls Lien, who had worked for World Vision for six years.

"But it was not easy. After the new government took over I could not work. I was jobless and worried about our safety. We thought we would have to go to re-education camp."

Soon after, Lien was ordered to report to the central security office for questioning by the new Communist leadership.

"They asked me why I worked for World Vision. World Vision was considered an American organisation at the time. They said, 'Do you know World Vision is not a humanitarian organisation but a spy for the CIA?' They

thought I'd been left behind to be a spy.

"They investigated me for three days and threatened me. They said, 'You are in our hands.' They wanted me to work for them as a spy. They asked me to inform on my family."

Lien was determined to escape. On one attempt, Lien, with some members of her family and other escapees, was arrested and imprisoned after being abandoned in the jungle.

On another attempt, she tried to escape with several others in small sampans, traveling for six days until they were supposed to have been met by a ship. But the ship had been caught earlier by marine security and the escape was abandoned.

Finally, on the darkest September night in 1981, Lien took to the sea in a small boat with 70 other people, including 25 children.

When they were about 400 kilometres from Singapore, the 71 souls were saved by a Pakistani vessel. They were told they were the first refugees to be picked up by the ship. On previous trips, the vessel had to bypass refugees because it had not been commissioned by the United Nations to pick them up.

The refugees were taken to a Singapore refugee camp.

"That's when I saw World Vision people and it was a great relief to me," said Lien.

"We stayed for two months and I worked as an interpreter. Then a doctor from the Royal Melbourne Hospital, who I had met many years earlier in Vietnam, sponsored me and I came to Australia.

"And again I was working with World Vision.

"As I am a woman of deep faith, I believe in the mighty hand that led me to this beautiful land of the people of compassion. It is a privilege to say from the bottom of my heart, thank you, Australia. You've given me a new life and new hope and dreams of living in true freedom and justice. And all that has come true for me."

Lien is married to Roger Walker, who worked extensively in the field and in executive positions for World Vision Australia for more than three decades.

A NEW LIFE FOR DESPERATE WOMEN

NEWLEYWEDS Catherine and Reg Hamlin – both doctors – had left their Sydney home in answer to an advertisement asking for help to set up a midwifery clinic in Ethiopia. Once there, they discovered there was a much more desperate need for their skills.

They had planned to stay three years at most. Nearly six decades on, Catherine Hamlin is still in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, running a medical facility dedicated exclusively to providing free obstetric fistula repair surgery to poor women suffering from childbirth injuries.

A fistula is a hole between the rectum or bladder and the birth canal. It occurs most commonly in Ethiopia and other African countries where girls are forced to marry as young as 11 and give birth as young as 13 or 14.

If a girl's body is underdeveloped and cannot hold a baby, it causes an obstructed labour, often lasting five or six days, and eventually a stillbirth. The baby's head puts pressure on the birth canal, cutting off blood supply. The tissues die and a hole develops that leaks urine and faeces.

Women with fistulas commonly lead lives of misery, forsaken by husbands, families, neighbours and friends and forced to live alone as social outcasts.

The Hamlins set up a hospital to repair fistulas. Catherine made the gowns for the operating theatre and the sheets for the beds on her sewing machine. The more women they treated, the more came to the "little hospital on the river".

The first they treated was a 16-year-old girl. After a successful operation, the Hamlins sent her home to her village with a new dress and new hope.

Catherine, her husband, and the hospital's medical staff have treated more than 40,000 women for obstetric fistula.

Women like Amawa, who was found in a dilapidated hut, crouched in the dark, downcast and listless. She was pregnant in the first year of her marriage. After a long labour her child was born dead, and she was left with a double fistula, completely incontinent.

When asked about her husband, tears welled up and trickled down her cheeks. "He destroyed me and then he left," she said. Amawa's mother looked after her until she sadly died, leaving her daughter to endure her affliction alone. She had been told there was a hospital in Addis Ababa where she could be cured, but she did not have the bus fare. When the

outreach team found her, she had been in this condition for years. They arranged for her to go to the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital and she was cured with one simple operation.

The demand for operations was massive. In the mid-70s, the Hamlins turned to World Vision for help.

Bernard Barron, who had been World Vision Australia's first director, visited the clinic in 1974 and was deeply impressed by the work carried out.

"Some women anticipating labour tried to walk from their villages across mountainous Ethiopia to Addis Ababa in the hope of receiving help, but there were no facilities for them. Many died on the way," he wrote. "Others needed blood transfusions, which were unavailable. Because of the poor and inadequate roads, the mountainous nature of Ethiopia and the distances from adequate help, a very large group of women faced a lifetime of not merely incapacity but lonely degradation as well.

"The pressures on the Hamlin Fistula Clinic were more than the Hamlins could cope with in terms of demands for beds and also for financing. They wanted to establish a larger hospital dedicated to fistula sufferers. They were also training Ethiopian staff how to treat, operate and do follow up. They were expecting more women who had been operated on to return when they were pregnant again and so more waiting room sections would be needed for them, as well as for those who had the operation but needed recuperation before returning home. The Hamlins always paid their bus fares back to their villages.

"Meeting this doctor who has dedicated her life to saving women has given me a deep compassion for her work in Ethiopia."

Bernard Barron reported back to World Vision, and its offices in Canada and Australia agreed to contribute to the fistula program.

Catherine Hamlin has often described the fistula problem as similar to leprosy. "We feel this is as serious, but because it's affecting women, and these are the poorest women in the world, it's been a hidden problem and nobody's done anything about it. Here we are in the 21st century and still there are millions of women suffering. If it had been men affected, I'm sure something would have been done long ago."

Fistulas remain a serious medical problem in Africa. There are 8,000 cases every year in Ethiopia; in Nigeria alone there are one million women waiting

to be healed.

Through civil war, Communist rule and decades of drought and famine, the Hamlins have remained dedicated to maintaining a hospital where women – deserted by their husbands and ostracised by their villages – would come to be repaired.

Reg Hamlin died in 1993. Catherine, now in her 90s, continues the work. She has twice been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

World Vision Australia's long association with Dr Hamlin and her facility continues. And it's not only financial aid. World Vision supporters in Australia have sent hundreds of knitted shawls and other clothing for the fistula patients.

ANIL Arora decided to do something unique to celebrate his 50th birthday – he sponsored 50 World Vision children.

The New South Wales ophthalmologist said the milestone birthday caused him to reflect on his life. He felt the need to "give back" and so decided to sponsor 25 boys and 25 girls – one child for every year of his life.

"It's something I'd been thinking about for some time," he said. "I've always appreciated what charities do and I have been involved with charities for a number of years. I have always liked what World Vision does."

Half of the 50 sponsored children are from Dr Arora's birthplace, India, and the others from around the world.

"I have done most of my growing up in Australia," he said. "We'd go back to India every two or three years and you do see poverty and children living in very tough conditions and it does affect you. I was fortunate to become an eye specialist and this is my way of giving back."

With help from staff at the Laser Vision Clinic Central Coast, each sponsored child receives correspondence from Dr Arora. "I couldn't do it on my own, the staff love being involved. And so do my patients; they are playing a part. A percentage of funds from every laser vision correction surgery goes towards child sponsorship."

Two large framed photo boards hang in the waiting rooms at the clinic, displaying photos of each of the 50 sponsored children. Dr Arora now plans to sponsor four more children every year, to reach 100 kids by the time he turns 65.

"I knew it was important that the staff were on board. It's easy to kick in

some funds every month but you have to do it properly. They love it.

"The patients see the pictures of the kids and the tone of the place softens. Maybe they realise we are more than just the laser vision clinic. We are there for a bigger purpose; a greater good."

For more than a decade, Anil went back to India each year to do charity eye work, initially with an organisation called Surgical Eye Expeditions and then with a charity eye hospital in Delhi.

Dr Arora also sources ophthalmic equipment in Australia to send to India. "Each year I collect as much donated equipment as I can from the various hospitals I work at, and take it with me when I go to India," he said.

"I'm planning to visit some of the children in the next few years, to be able to see where they live and see sponsorship at work."

Dr Arora and his team look forward to seeing the lives of their sponsored children change for the better in the years to come, as their communities benefit from basic essentials such as clean water and sanitation, nutrition and healthcare, and education.

"I'm proud that my organisation and I can be a small part of this wonderful effort to make the world a better place for those who aren't as lucky as we are."

16

NIGHTMARES AND MIRACLES IN CAMBODIA

DURING a 1974 visit to Cambodia, when the nation was in the midst of a malaria epidemic, Graeme Irvine visited a mobile clinic set up by World Vision Australia and New Zealand.

About 300 people were waiting for treatment. Many were just hanging onto life.

There he saw a tiny boy on a table, critically ill and struggling to breathe.

He watched as Dr Penelope Key inserted a tube into the boy's throat and sucked out the phlegm, spitting it into a bowl. Graeme marvelled at her commitment, ignoring the risk to herself.

She then injected adrenaline into the boy's heart but the child died.

Gently taking the dead boy in her arms, she carried him to an assistant and told her go to the mother and stay with her as she mourned for her child.

The next day, Graeme Irvine left for Australia and sat next to a doctor on the plane. During the flight, the doctor helped a woman give birth and the aircraft was greeted by an excited media in Australia.

It made the front pages.

“I could not help but contrast our high-flying birth with the grief of a mother in Cambodia,” said Graeme. “One child is born among public fanfare while, 5,000 miles away, another dies in obscurity; uprooted with no home, no grave, no hope. The message for me was you can’t celebrate life in one part of the world while ignoring suffering in another. We are one human family sharing a common humanity.”

World Vision had first entered Cambodia, a troubled nation slightly smaller in area than Victoria, in 1970 in response to the nation’s international appeals for assistance.

In the following five years, World Vision carried out many relief and development activities, including constructing schools, sponsoring children, building housing units for refugees and conducting emergency feeding and distribution programs for refugees.

In the years just before Pol Pot, World Vision had built a paediatric hospital that was due to be dedicated on 17 April 1975 – the same day Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge forces flooded into the capital Phnom Penh.

All World Vision operations ended on that day and expatriates and several national staff were evacuated.

Hundreds of thousands of those deemed unsympathetic to the new government were cruelly murdered. One was World Vision Cambodia director Minh Tien Vaun, who was executed by the Khmer Rouge as he helped people fallen on a roadside during the evacuation of Phnom Penh. World Vision leaders had encouraged him to leave but he said he felt called to stay with his people.

When World Vision re-entered Cambodia shortly after the Vietnamese overthrow of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, very few of the original 270 World Vision staff members had survived the genocidal Khmer Rouge reign.

The initial focus of World Vision’s return to Cambodia included meeting emergency needs, assisting in restoring social services, rehabilitating the food producing sectors of the economy and restoring the paediatric hospital, which had been used as a torture and execution centre for political

prisoners by the Khmer Rouge.

World Vision US president Stan Mooneyham tried several times to get permission from the new government to open the paediatric hospital and was rebuffed. Negotiations seemed to be going nowhere.

In frustration, he took extraordinary action in a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister) Hun Sen who had told him: “We are not the same people. You don’t understand our ways.”

According to an eyewitness account by Stan’s son Eric Mooneyham: “My father did something that shocked everyone there including me. He took out his Swiss-army pocket knife and opened the blade. He rolled up his sleeve, held his arm high and drew the blade across his wrist. When the blood began to drip out of the cut, he brought his arm close to the Khmer leader (Hun Sen) and said with tears, ‘Look at the colour of my blood, not the colour of my face. Give me back that hospital.’ There was a chilling silence that lasted for some time. I think everyone in the room took time out from their political perspectives for a moment and reflected on the human example they had just witnessed.”

Hun Sen instantly gave Stan Mooneyham permission to open his hospital.

Australian field worker Ian Curtis remembers that it took World Vision workers three months to clean up the building. “It was used as a torture chamber and there was blood all over the walls,” he said.

Ian Curtis and his team flew in supplies from Singapore to Cambodia in an old DC3 and an Argosy aircraft.

“We took in everything, including pigs and chickens. We had to spray the pigs in flight to keep them cool.

“Hun Sen was trying to run a new government without typewriters, without pens, without clocks and without paper.

“So when you went into the country you’d always give them your belt and any pens you had – sometimes even glasses.

“We had to find watches. We’d always wear a couple of cheap watches and hand them over.

“How do you set up a meeting if you don’t know what time it is? It was crazy.

“We even tracked down a Khmer typeface in Brazil of all places. Olivetti had

one in Brazil. So then we were able to get 200 typewriters made with that typeface and took them in, so at least they could type out minutes of meetings and agendas for cabinet.

“It was just nuts in those early days. There was nothing. There were only about four roads open in Phnom Penh. One road had petrol pumps piled up in a huge triangle. Another one had all these abandoned cars. Anything that was modern was chucked out. The rest of the roads were grown over. They were just jungle. You never met anyone in Cambodia who wasn’t impacted by what had happened.

“I remember when we first went into what was called the Palace Hotel. The rats were like cats running up and down the corridors and we had sardines three meals a day in the first week we were there.”

Another World Vision Australia field worker, Roger Walker, who had been running the Bangkok office, was also sent to Cambodia in 1979.

“The actual horror of it was just enormous,” he said. “You saw the emptiness of people’s eyes. I remember going in and everyone wore ragged black. And coming out of Bangkok, where everyone wore colours, the impact was profound. Cambodia was one of the major impacts on World Vision.”

Roger led the push for the Australian Government to withdraw recognition of Pol Pot’s government and to take the leader to the International Court of Justice.

The Khmer Rouge’s victory was particularly painful for Roger.

He had organised two Cambodian children, aged 10 and 12, to be brought to Australia for heart surgery in late 1974. The operations were a success and they returned to Cambodia in February 1975.

“I faced the question of whether they would go back to Cambodia,” said Roger. “We didn’t know what was going to happen with the war and I made the decision to send them back. They had parents and family in Cambodia and what right did I have to stop them going back to their families when they were healthy? It was an agonising decision.

“I had that dreadful awareness when Pol Pot took over two months after the children returned.”

After Pol Pot was thrown out in 1979, Roger Walker was one of the first Europeans to go back and he asked about the fate of these two children.

“This went on for seven or eight years and I couldn’t find them and thought they’d both died. One time I was travelling and found someone who knew one of the children. One had survived and the other one had died.

“Did I do the right thing? I don’t know. Whether you made the right or wrong decision, you made it with the best information you had at the time.”

Then there was the miracle baby.

Ian Curtis noticed a distinct lack of hope when he first entered Phnom Penh.

The women were so malnourished that they stopped menstruating.

“There were only three of the 80 odd doctors who had been working in Phnom Penh left and two of the three had forgotten everything they’d learned. The one who remained was the Health Minister.

“The eyes on the medical staff were just dead. All the nurses and doctors we brought in had dead eyes.

“But then we had a baby that nearly died and we said the only thing we can do for this kid is to pray. So we prayed all night and, in the morning, the kid was still alive.

“He made it and we nicknamed the kid the baby of hope.”

The story of this miracle baby spread fast and had a profound effect.

“The eyes came alive again and the women started menstruating,” said Ian. “It was incredible how a little bit of hope can greatly change things.”

17

THE FAILED RANSOM ATTEMPT

AT the fall of Laos in May 1975, the Pathet Lao Communist rebels came to power and took a general secretary of the local churches hostage, demanding a ransom of US$13,620 as compensation for the costs of demonstrations against both the US and World Vision.

The range of demands included the cost of placards used during the demonstrations.

The assistant director of World Vision Laos, who had relocated to Thailand due to the Communist takeover, received the demand via a courier in World Vision’s Bangkok office.

The assistant director decided to pay the ransom without checking with anyone else, including the World Vision Thailand director, Australian Roger Walker.

The courier was given a cheque for the ransom and headed back to Laos.

Later that same day, Roger Walker learned what had happened. Knowing that World Vision's policy was not to pay ransoms, he cancelled the cheque, unbeknown to the hostage takers.

"They freed the church secretary, who I understand then escaped," said Roger.

Roger was later directly involved in the restarting of World Vision's work in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

Home to six million people, Laos is still one the most disadvantaged nations in Southeast Asia. The majority of people live in rural villages, without access to basic facilities such as clean water, healthcare, education and electricity.

Many families try to make a living from farming, but struggle to adequately feed their children. The land is rugged and the soil is littered with landmines and unexploded bombs left over from the Vietnam War.

From 1964 to 1973, the US dropped more than two million tonnes of bombs on Laos – more than the total number of bombs dropped on Europe during World War II and equivalent to a planeload of bombs dropping every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years. And 30 percent of those bombs did not explode.

World Vision began working in Laos in 1969, but was forced to suspend relief and child sponsorship work at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Work was resumed in 1981.

Funds from Australian supporters have since helped clear land of unexploded bombs, rebuild roads and bridges, run food support programs, expand rice fields and fight child labour and exploitation in Laos.

18

"OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT"

IN its early years, World Vision was largely controlled by its "northern offices" – those on the other side of the planet.

One international executive had told then Australian CEO Graeme Irvine in the early 1970s that Australia was regarded as merely “an outstation for collecting funds”.

Graeme became convinced that Australia – and other donor countries – needed a say in how and where funds were spent and a share in discussions on policy, strategic decisions and long-term direction.

He said this was not so much a desire for control as a need for accountability to Australian donors and a sense of participation.

Stan Mooneyham, the US president, agreed and said the new frontier for World Vision was internationalisation, a true partnership across national and cultural boundaries. It was not a move to be politically correct, but to fulfil the mission more effectively.

Australia was at the forefront of leading the change.

Australian board member Robert Coles said there was a perception in the early days that World Vision was “just the US”.

“But it wasn’t too long before the concept of internationalisation became a subject for discussion. There were some places in the world where the US wasn’t all that popular, especially after the North Vietnamese took control of all of Vietnam.

“There were obviously countries like Australia that could have an influence and so there was a need to make World Vision an international organisation where everybody involved had a say. I think there was some reluctance from the American side at first but that changed. It took about six years to bring about internationalisation.”

Australian CEO Harold Henderson played an important role in the process to make World Vision a genuine international agency. He also championed the efforts to have the new World Vision International embrace justice as an essential part of the ministry worldwide and for the partnership to be wise to the need to be independent of US foreign policy.

“Internationalisation was a long process and it needed to be,” he said. “The reins had been tightly held by the American board and so we had to bring into that fold all the units across the world. It was an important time for World Vision.”

In 1977, Stan Mooneyham invited key leaders of World Vision from across the world to meet at Pattaya Beach in Thailand for a week of preliminary

discussion and to brainstorm this potential new organisational concept and how it might affect each of the core entities.

A year later, a larger group met at the Kahala Hilton Hotel in Honolulu and for a second week crafted the details of what this new organisation might be. Under the new structure, the original World Vision entity, headquartered in America, gave up much of its authority to the new World Vision International office in order to be part of a larger fellowship.

Graeme Irvine was charged with the responsibility to implement the internationalisation document which was developed at the Hawaii meeting.

In 1978, the boards of the several "incorporating members" of an enlarged and restructured World Vision International met "to be launched by the Holy Spirit upon a new venture in partnership and ministry". There was no majority vote. The decision was a unanimous step of faith that became known in World Vision circles as "our great experiment".

But there were some to whom the decision did not make sense, said Graeme Irvine. It was not the way big corporations did business.

"But then, they were not engaged in the process of human transformation as we were," he said.

World Vision was one of the first NGOs to internationalise.

This effort of internationalisation proved to be a model for many other international organisations and they have, over the years, studied the process of allowing separate country entities to have a strong voice in policy matters related to the ministry.

It was a risky and bold move to make all the fundraising offices – about five at the time including Australia – independent entities with an equal voice.

The overarching World Vision International entity was created that shared leadership among Western donor countries.

As a federated organisation, each country's office now had its own board, leadership, and constitution. Representatives from the various countries and regions came together to govern the larger World Vision International, but funding, program initiatives and governance of each office was distinct.

19

THE 40 HOUR FAMINE

CANADIAN teenager Ruth Roberts and her church youth group went hungry for a day and a half and unwittingly started a global movement.

Moved by the TV images of starving children in Africa, 17-year-old Ruth and her friends held a “starve in” at a church basement in February 1971 to raise money to help feed impoverished people in the developing world.

Ruth had posed a simple question to her church group –“Have you ever been really hungry?” Not one person in the group said they had.

The little group raised $600 for World Vision’s work and the “famine” event grew into a movement involving tens of thousands of young people in 21 countries and raising millions of dollars every year to help feed hungry children.

Australia launched the 40 Hour Famine in Victoria in 1975 and was the first nation to make it a coordinated national event in 1978.

Tens of thousands of Australian school children and their families have since discovered through the event something about what it is to be poor and hungry.

In the first years of the 40 Hour Famine, staff members were recruited to speak in churches and schools about the event.

“We had a little audio video production that we played to people,” said event staffer Barbara Tuckett. “There was no fancy technology in those days.

“People who signed up were given brown paper bags to write sponsors’ names on and they put the money in the bags. After the event, they’d send a cheque in the bag or deliver a bag with money to the office.

“It took off like wildfire and money poured into the office. We had so much that we had to put all the money into a wheelbarrow at one stage. Then we had to rent an extra room to handle all the money.

“Everything was recorded manually in those days – there were no computers – and we all worked day and night for several weeks. It was a great adventure and everybody at World Vision got on board.”

More than 16,000 Victorians signed up for the first 40 Hour Famine, and raised $570,000 in the process.

One of the participants in the first event was current CEO Tim Costello.

“I was studying law at Monash University and I went off and starved for a

weekend," he said.

"My brother Peter and a friend were running the World Vision stall at the university."

Tim said the experience taught him how some people of his age had to live.

"They have no choice. For us in our bubble, there's always money in our wallets and food to eat but that's not the same for everyone. It greatly expanded my empathy."

Going national was the brainchild of World Vision Australia's communications director David Longe, who said he had come up with the idea for a 40 Hour Famine in the shower. He had a vision of hundreds of thousands of Australians slamming the fridge door shut on Friday night and going without food for 40 hours until midday Sunday to raise money for hungry people throughout the world.

There was marketing genius in choosing 40 hours for the event, rather than the 30-hour or 24-hour events that were being set up by World Vision offices in other parts of the world.

Longe and the World Vision communications department realised that Friday nights and Sundays were generally slow news times for media organisations, so the start and finish of the 40 Hour Famines could potentially get wide coverage.

"David Longe had big ideas," said future CEO Philip Hunt, then working in the marketing and communications department.

"We ran the 40 Hour Famine first in the three eastern states. It was generally considered in the organisation as a failure because it had cost so much to run and it hadn't raised the ratio you need. The general feeling was that it hadn't really worked.

"David said the problem was economy of scale. We needed to do it bigger. That was David all over. If it doesn't work we need to do it bigger and better.

"So we said, 'Ok, let's do it as a national event.' I thought that was wonderful. Our CEO Harold [Henderson] backed him and we did it as a national event and it started to take off.

"Where it had been run before like a package to a youth group, Australia was first to do it as a coordinated national event with massive publicity."

The first national 40 Hour Famine in 1978 raised $1.3 million. The youngest fundraiser that year was seven-year-old David Cox, who admitted he was mighty hungry “but not nearly as hungry as the poor people in the world”.

In Victoria, then Premier Dick Hamer and his wife also signed on to fast for the 40 hours.

Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, agreeing to be patron of the first national event, said: “If there is one characteristic which is common to all Australians, it is their willingness to help a neighbour in need. We are now able to use that characteristic to help our neighbours in other parts of the world.”

By 1985, 270,000 participants raised $5.2 million with the support of one million sponsors.

The 40 Hour Famine has become a rite of passage for many young people, giving them their first taste of activism and engagement in social justice. More than half the schools in Australia have participated in the 40 Hour Famine at some point in the past four decades.

Communications and marketing expert John Rose said the 40 Hour Famine had increased awareness among many young Australians.

“We got a lot of people on board through school involvement who I bumped into 10 or 15 years later when they were in high positions in media and TV stations and they said that their initial experience in the 40 Hour Famine had opened their minds to poverty.

“Back in the period when it started, there were no studies in the school curriculum for Third World issues. The Famine gave us a window of opportunity to talk to schools.”

World Vision’s Keith Lancaster recalled the success of the national event.

“We had advertisements playing on TV and as soon as they played the phones in the phone room would suddenly light up. It hadn’t been done before. There were no rules; no right or wrong ways to do it. We just had to find solutions. We had lists of when ads would be likely to play and the phones would just light up with 30 or 40 calls coming through at the same time.”

“The 40 Hour Famine cost a lot to run but it made a big splash,” said Philip Hunt. “The other thing is it made a big impact on the participants and most of them were young. Kids remember they went on the 40 Hour Famine and

some of those kids got interested in the Third World.

“One of the debates in the early days was how to make it a World Vision event because it became a brand in its own right. So we had to be clever in always calling it the World Vision 40 Hour Famine and making sure the World Vision logo was attached.”

The 40 Hour Famine continues to be one of Australia’s longest standing and best known fundraising events. It is the biggest youth event in the nation. The concept has evolved since it began with people now giving up a range of different things – mobile phones, social media or even speaking – as well as food for 40 hours.

In 2015, 300,000 young people participated in 1.64 million hours of giving up together to raise more than $3 million.

Around $200 million has been raised over the years, providing practical help to reduce hunger and malnutrition. This has transformed the lives of many children, families and communities around the world.

In the past seven years alone, more than two million people have benefited from food assistance through 40 Hour Famine funds.

20

THE CYCLE IS BROKEN

MONEY raised by the 40 Hour Famine over four decades has helped millions of people to break the cycle of hunger and poverty.

They include Lalu and Sarita from the far west of Nepal. World Vision’s Matt Darvas first met the children when he went to Nepal to make a film to promote the 40 Hour Famine in 2009.

Lalu, then seven, was being looked after by his elderly grandfather, who feared for the little boy’s future when he died.

Lalu’s father had been killed in a civil war battle and his mother had remarried and moved away. After a crop failure, Lalu’s family had only had one bag of grain to last the whole winter when heavy snowfall made it impossible to go outside. Lalu spent hours each day walking to fetch water and was unable to attend school.

Sarita, then 10, had been forced to stay at home to clean up and fetch water from a river while her five brothers went to school. Her father, a

migrant worker in India, had fallen ill and the girl's future seemed grim.

Six years later, World Vision's Matt Darvas returned to the area to see how support from Australians who had participated in the 40 Hour Famine had helped the children.

He found a village vastly improved, with clean water on tap, new classrooms, a government hydropower system electrifying the village, and both families in new homes of their own.

Sarita now goes to school on a scholarship provided by World Vision. She wants to be a nurse.

21

A CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP

AFTER seven years as head of World Vision Australia, Graeme Irvine was asked to move to California to lead World Vision's field operations in early 1975.

"There was a huge gap after Graeme Irvine was invited to go to America to work," said board member Robert Coles.

"For about nine months, one of our board members, Bruce Ogden, came down from Sydney where he had a furniture manufacturing business and spent time virtually running the office in Melbourne as an interim unpaid CEO until Harold Henderson was appointed. Bruce stayed at the Athenaeum Club and went home on weekends. He was a fine man."

Harold Henderson, then on the staff of the Central Methodist Mission in Sydney, was invited by the board to apply for the position of Australian executive director.

"My initial reaction was that I was probably not conservative enough for World Vision and I didn't want to move to Melbourne," he said.

"But I took it as a call I needed to explore and I was appointed to the position near the end of 1975.

"I didn't know what to expect and I didn't have any preconceptions. I went there with a sense of possible call and I was open to what God might want me to do next. It was a fledgling organisation in those days. But it was a small organisation that had made a very good start in the field, mainly as a child sponsorship agency. It was fairly narrowly based but seemed to me to

have enormous potential in a field that required all the potential you could put into it because the needs were enormous."

Harold, now retired and living in Gainesville, Florida, was convinced that World Vision needed to expand its support base outside the evangelical community. "I could not see any reason why it could not have wider ecumenical appeal," he said. "It could appeal to the general community outside the churches.

"I felt it needed to expand from being a child sponsorship agency to being a genuine emergency relief and development agency and, in a way, it had made its first tentative steps. We needed to be more than a fundraising organisation. We really needed to take our part in community education and advocacy."

Harold was to lead World Vision through a period of explosive growth.

One key change in his era was the discovery of the power of television to move hearts and minds.

22

UNLEASHING THE POWER OF THE BOX

WORLD Vision Australia's communications director, David Longe, was a creative genius whose stated aim was "to make World Vision a household name".

He did it with saturation advertising in print and electronic media, particularly TV, and in well-produced features made specifically for television audiences about World Vision's work.

According to Kevin Gray, World Vision's chief financial officer who joined in 1976, Longe was "one of the original marketing heavyweights who had forgotten more about marketing than most people ever knew".

"He was brilliant at what he did. He was controversial and abrasive – we used to have regular disputes – but nobody ever doubted that the guy delivered the goods.

"He had his ear plugged into our typical donor. He had the donor market so well understood that he actually had a name for our typical donor – 'Mrs Murphy of Moonee Ponds'. If it was a bad idea he'd say, 'Mrs Murphy wouldn't buy that.'

“He drank and slept and breathed what the market would do and World Vision was the beneficiary. David had an expression ‘short back and sides’ which was his term for anything that wasn’t progressive, anything that didn’t speak to a common vocabulary.

“His view was that it was not good enough for us to simply sit back and say, ‘Look, we don’t care what you think or what you know, we’ve got a million people starving to death in Kenya right now and we want your money. We don’t want to argue about it, just give us your money.’

“And that was the way some aid agencies talked in the seventies. David always approached things with a smile and wanted to engage people.”

It didn’t always go to plan. “We put up a print ad picture of a starving child early in the ’70s. And the strapline read, ‘A dog in Australia eats better’,” said David Longe’s then assistant and later CEO Philip Hunt.

“David and I thought it was arresting but it caused a furore because it was a bit too in-your-face. On reflection, I could never do it now because it was an insult to the child really. Some people sent us cans of dog food.”

But former World Vision marketing and communications expert John Rose thought the ad was “absolutely valid at the time”.

“The context of it is that, at the time, people really weren’t caring about what was happening overseas and we were trying to make the juxtaposition in terms of how we look after our animals better than we are prepared to look after children overseas,” he said.

“I think it was a bit of breakthrough advertising and extremely creative. Maybe you wouldn’t get away with it in today’s environment. I still frankly believe there’s validity in running that sort of advertising.

“As I recall it, the RSPCA and every dog lover were hammering down our door and saying ‘how dare you’. I think we got more negativity than we assumed. But it got people talking.”

David Longe was a pioneer of World Vision Australia’s fundraising telemovies shot in developing countries. He hired well-known Australians, including journalist Anne Deveson, to front them.

“The first film we made with World Vision was with the Korean Children’s Choir in Korea,” recalled Warwick Olson, a producer with World Vision Australia partner Pilgrim Films.

“The Seven Network wouldn’t buy it but agreed to broadcast it. That was a

turning point for World Vision. That gave World Vision a public airing that it hadn't had before."

The big breakthrough was a Pilgrim Films/World Vision program shot in Africa with Rowena Wallace. It aired on the Seven Network in prime time and, for the first time, World Vision's phone number was shown at the end of the program.

"It closed down the east coast telephone exchange with so many calls," said Warwick Olson. "We took 35,000 names before the whole thing collapsed in a burning heap.

"We had different phone numbers in each state. I had a phone call from some guy in Tasmania the next morning and he said, 'What am I going to do with all these names I've got? That program you put on last night had my telephone number to contact.'

"He had nothing to do with World Vision but he had taken down about 400 names that he passed on to us."

23

THE OTHER DAVE

ANOTHER David made perfect what David Longe had pioneered.

Dave Toycen, an American, had been the international communications manager for World Vision in the US before coming to Australia.

His first job in the US was making radio spots to encourage child sponsorship. Then he started carrying slide projectors and 16 mm projectors across the US to show in churches and public venues. He also produced material for the weekly TV program *Come Walk The World*, hosted by World Vision US president Stan Mooneyham, which profiled the work of Christians in changing the world. The skills he learnt enabled him to produce early World Vision documentaries.

Over lunch with Philip Hunt, who was soon to move from his communications director role in World Vision Australia to set up a fundraising operation in Hong Kong, Dave decided to move to Australia.

"I said, 'What do you think of an American taking your place?' and I thought he would say, 'No, it's got to be an Australian,' but he said, 'I don't think it would be a problem.' I got brave. I told him I wanted the job. I hadn't even

talked to my wife about this but that's how it happened."

Under Dave Toycen's communications leadership, World Vision Australia increased its influence with a number of well-produced TV documentaries.

"It took us about 18 months to get the concept down that would work with the networks in Australia," said Dave.

"The three commercial stations basically had a lock on things and they wouldn't really sell you prime time. They were keeping that for their regular big time advertisers."

Then entered the genius of Bruce Gyngell, often credited as being the first person to appear on Australian television, former CEO of both Channel Nine and Channel Seven and creator of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

"Bruce Gyngell was between jobs when we approached him," said Dave Toycen. "We had a great meeting with him and he was very willing to help us. There was no secret to the Gyngell model. He said basically we had to find the hottest TV celebrity we could, make the program, pay for the production costs, include commercial breaks and the networks would give us free air time. No-one had done it quite that way before.

"We did tests with Roger Climpson and Anne Deveson and I knew we had a great thing going," said Dave Toycen. "Then actress Rowena Wallace [who had regular roles in the TV dramas *Cop Shop* and *Sons and Daughters*] agreed to be our celebrity in Thailand.

"In the first TV airing on an Easter weekend, we signed 20,000 new child sponsors in an hour. That's how it started. That model was good for 15 years probably. It was great.

"Soon after our first few documentaries, Bruce got a job in London as CEO at TV AM. We had to figure out a way to still use him so we'd corner him for a weekend every year and show him everything we'd produced and we'd look at all the new ideas and he'd give us his feedback.

"He was a great marketer; a very intelligent person, and at heart was a very caring and generous person."

Dave Toycen went on to become CEO of World Vision Canada. He retired in 2015 after 42 years with World Vision.

According to Warwick Olson, the World Vision specials were "not cheap to make, but we needed to spend money to ensure that production values were high".

He said there was criticism from some that the World Vision documentaries were exploitive, simplistic or too emotional.

“Of course the programs were emotionally charged but we were just showing the reality and that triggered a direct response from viewers,” he said. “The subject matter was always fairly emotional and you can’t get away from that.

“Emotional images portray human needs and donors respond to that need. It is necessary to stir emotion into communication to communicate and educate successfully.”

Harold Henderson, looking back on World Vision’s massive growth during the era, said: “I always felt one reason why we were so effective is that we tapped into something important in the Australian community. It wasn’t something we created but we provided a channel through which people could contribute their good will and sense of mateship. One of the reasons we were so effective was that we were prepared to think big in influencing public opinion and we had some very skilled communicators to do it.”

During his leadership, community leaders and members increasingly worked with World Vision to identify issues and implement solutions. Communities were empowered to break their own cycle of poverty.

As CEO of World Vision Australia, Harold Henderson travelled widely.

“I wanted to make sure we tuned ourselves into where the rubber hits the road, which wasn’t in Melbourne or Sydney but in Kampala, Saigon or wherever,” he said.

“I was in some of the most precarious and poorest places on earth and these experiences had a tremendous impact on me, as they needed to.

“One of the phrases that means a lot to me came from Bob Pierce – Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God. I always thought that, if that doesn’t happen to you, maybe you need to be in another field.

“I didn’t ever get to that point where I was overwhelmed by the depth of suffering. There were very discouraging places and discouraging things that happened but I was always motivated by the Martin Luther King idea that just because something is difficult, it is not justification for doing nothing.

“You do what you can and you don’t beat yourself over the head about what you can’t do, otherwise you become immobilised. Even in the most unlikely of circumstances there were always pinpoints of light.

“Some of the greatest acts of generosity that I ever saw were on the part of the poorest people I ever met. We had a lot to learn from those we served and we needed to be humble about that.”

24

A FAR DIFFERENT STORY

IN 1975, Australian journalist Anne Deveson went to Ethiopia with World Vision, supposedly to make a film about the nation’s recovery from the 1973 famine. She returned with a far different story.

In the northern part of the country, where the famine had struck, the hunger problem was solved. The market places were full of healthy animals and there were sacks of grain and food everywhere.

But it soon became apparent that a second famine among the nomadic tribes of the south was occurring.

The film team went south and found a situation far worse than anything that had struck the nation before.

Here, Deveson was confronted with women holding up their babies and saying “Loshe Loshe” (aching stomach).

“I had seen pictures of famine but I wasn’t prepared for the utter helplessness I felt,” she said in an interview on her return to Australia.

“I nursed one child who weighed little more than a newborn baby. He was seven years old.”

The happy ending film was never made. Instead Anne Deveson and the crew returned to Australia with stark evidence of a massive famine.

“It was the first time I had been in a situation like that,” she said.

“I thought I’d prepared myself. I’d looked at a lot of films on famine. I’d read quite a lot about it then I actually found myself in the middle of the desert in this extreme heat, and this miles and miles of this sand and desert and these corpses of people wrapped in white linen shrouds waiting to be buried, and crows wheeling overhead, and, you know, the bones of dead animals scattered on the sand.

“And all these people who were starving, with their hands reaching out, and there was nothing you could give them ... I did become overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness and I remember wanting to cry and indeed the tears

were running down my cheeks. And the cameraman said, 'It's alright love, we all have to cry,' or something like that. So it was a kind of awareness that, indeed, that emotional reaction was quite okay.

"It was a part of being there. But then you had to get on with the job. So you stopped crying.

"It's important that we bear witness. It's important that people know what's happening. It's important that we can relay through pictures and images and writing what it's like to see starvation."

In May 1979, Anne Deveson visited Uganda with another World Vision film crew and discovered a nation that had been "anaesthetised" by the fear of Idi Amin.

Amin had just fled after the Tanzanian "liberators" had arrived and Uganda was a broken nation still reeling from eight years of atrocities that had left at least 500,000 people dead.

Deveson told reporters on her return to Australia that it was "the most horrifying story I have ever covered."

She had flown from Nairobi to Uganda with a World Vision relief team, the first to enter the country since the borders were opened. World Vision had been poised on the border to follow in Amin's wake with relief supplies for the victims of the fighting. As Amin left Kampala, World Vision trucks crossed the border.

The purpose was to focus attention on what had happened to Uganda during the eight years of Amin's regime, and to decide what sort of aid was needed.

Deveson described Amin's secret three-story pink police headquarters in Kampala as looking like a motel –"but, as you approach it, you can smell this terrible stench of death".

Here, "enemies of the state" were brought for slaughter. Offices became torture chambers where crazed agents of Idi Amin strangled, shot and beheaded their victims. Sometimes as many as 20 died during a single day.

Although about 60 percent of the Ugandan population were Christians, Amin had been ready to declare Uganda a Muslim state. Christians – Catholics and Protestants – were at the top of the list for execution.

Pastors and bishops of the Church of Uganda told World Vision staff that Amin's spies would often sit quietly in church services. Days later, certain

members of the congregation would simply disappear. Most were simply shot. Others were tortured. Some were fed to crocodiles. To be a Christian under Amin was to put your life on the line.

A young policeman who escorted the World Vision team told of seeing hundreds of people being thrown to crocodiles. Despite the atrocities, Anne Deveson said there was little urge for revenge among most Ugandans.

She said government officials had told her, “We have too many widows already. We have suffered enough. Let us forgive but not forget.”

Philip Hunt, who was also in the World Vision group, found a country in chaos.

“It was my first encounter with systematic, paranoid violence,” he wrote in his book *Journeys to Justice*.

He visited the State Research Centre, the three-story torture chamber.

“Two days before, Amin’s troops had made a fast exit,” he wrote. “Within hours, Tanzanian troops liberated hundreds of people imprisoned inside. The foyer was a jumble of broken furniture and scattered books. A pile of smashed glass and pamphlets advertising sophisticated weapons lay against one wall. In the middle of this pile was a shattered portrait of Idi Amin, defaced by the inmates in futile but brutal revenge.”

The World Vision team was shown around the centre by a local Anglican priest who had spent 30 days there for the crime of having accidently parked his car in Idi Amin’s car space.

The priest said he had been locked in a cell about three metres square with 30 other men. There was no toilet and the men were forced to drink their own urine to stay alive.

Most people in his room had died, either starved or dehydrated. Twice during the 30 days of the priest’s incarceration, soldiers came and took away the dead bodies. Meanwhile, the living piled the dead on one side and lived with the stench.

In the aftermath of Amin’s departure, World Vision worked with the African Evangelistic Enterprise and other partners to provide emergency supplies.

World Vision helped Ugandans rebuild their country after Amin was deposed, and in 1985, opened an office there. Some of World Vision’s major accomplishments have included training farmers, developing clean water facilities, increasing public health and hygiene awareness, improving

nutrition and food production, providing former child soldiers with counselling and helping them reunite with their families, and offering education and vocational skills training to children who have lost one or both parents to HIV and AIDS.

25

SERENDIPITY IN BANGLADESH

IN open-air markets in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, World Vision's Dave Toycen saw young boys struggling to haul bags of fish half their weight.

"One boy was eight or nine years old, carrying 40 kilos on his back," he said. "His posture was already wrong; he was bent over. They were doing this 12 to 14 hours a day and young girls were working in factories cleaning shrimp."

Shrimp is Bangladesh's second largest industry, after garments. When the girls' sharp fish knives slice into their own flesh, they are told to continue working. The blood is simply washed off further down the line. All local fish processing plants have signs posted at the front gate reading: "No employment under 18". It's not being rigorously enforced.

None of the children Dave saw that day were attending school.

According to Bangladesh's own Labour Law, the minimum legal age for employment is 14. But child labour in Bangladesh is common, with an estimated 4.7 million children aged below 14 in the workforce.

They work in the informal sector – in small factories and workshops, on the street, in home-based businesses and domestic employment.

The stark images of child labour almost overwhelmed Dave Toycen with deep sadness and anger.

"I was just seeing the way these young minds and young bodies are being overwhelmed and I was getting more and more worked up by this."

The next day Dave went to a small World Vision centre looking after 50 girls and boys and enabling them to go to school after hours. He was still angry.

As he walked to the centre, the children lined up along the walkway and started singing the anthem *We Shall Overcome* in English.

"I just lost it," said Dave. "I started to cry. I said, 'This is unbelievable. These kids have a vision for the future.' It just breaks your heart in a wonderful

way.

“I’d looked at the situation the day before and said, ‘There is no hope here.’ And here I found hope. I’ve had that happen so many times in my experience, where these serendipitous moments take you to another level.

“I was humbled by the commitment that drives many children to show up at night school on empty stomachs at the end of a long work day. They’re determined to continue their education and pursue their dreams.

“These kids wanted to be doctors or air-conditioning technicians. One teenager was studying to be a lawyer while doing four jobs a day. Their whole world is different compared with the boys I was talking to the day before who just hoped they could carry a little heavier load of fish.

“From my perspective as a Christian, I realise that, even if you can’t see it, God’s at work here.

“How would anyone expect to hear Bangladeshi kids singing one of the great songs of hope – ‘We shall overcome, we shall overcome some day’? It was extraordinary.

“They don’t give up. How can we give up?”

Child labour is still rife in Bangladesh, a densely populated country roughly twice the size of Tasmania.

Bangladesh adopted the National Child Labour Elimination Policy, providing a framework to eradicate all forms of child labour by 2015, but according to the International Labour Organization, there are still around 3.2 million child labourers in Bangladesh and around 215 million kids worldwide are currently working in exploitative child labour conditions.

Children don’t work in harsh conditions because they want to; they work in these conditions because poverty forces them to.

Child labour can be defined as work that deprives children of their childhood and their potential.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 264 million children aged between five and 17 years old who are working. For many children, work contributes positively to their development and provides them with the skills and experience they will need for a productive future. However, more than 10 percent of the world’s working children are still below the minimum legal working age and/or are labouring at the expense of their health, education and development.

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THE UNSPOKEN BOND

DURING a visit to Bangladesh and Thailand, World Vision Australia supporter Pam wrote of her experiences.

"My thoughts return constantly to the women I meet in Bangladesh and Thailand," she wrote. "They live in a different world from the one I am used to, and it's a frightening one.

"These women, unimportant human beings in their community, have become very special to me. Their life is so burdened yet they struggle to feed their families. Their children are all important to them. How can they bear the suffering, the sickness, the seemingly endless life of existence? They are prisoners of poverty. They have so little, yet they smile. I wonder what they think of this Western woman with short hair and skirt, freely riding around in cars and on motorbikes?

"Bangladeshi women are shy, covered from head to foot in their saris, peeping out as I pass. I make a point of looking into the eyes of every woman I meet and smiling. I want to communicate with them, and they smile back. The more women I meet, the more I realise the unspoken bond, Eastern woman to Western one, different yet feeling the same. They call me 'Sister'. They are curious and they try to reach out to me. In my heart I feel the warmth of common humanity. I try to feel and understand the suffering, not with pity, but with compassion.

"I see so much suffering. In Klong Toey, a Bangkok slum, a woman aged about 30 sits on a step outside a one room shack. She is dying of cancer. She receives no treatment – she has no money, and is worried about her children. I identify with her. I've been there and the only difference is I had treatment because we were born in different countries. We pray with her, and then walk away. I hurt. Where is the justice?

"While staying in a village in Bangladesh, I hear a baby cry pitifully for two days in a little thatched hut outside the window of my room. I ask the interpreter to ask the mother what is wrong. She has a three year-old girl clinging to her and a two month-old baby in her arms. Her husband has recently died of TB and her milk has dried up. She is just 18 years old.

"The baby is starving. I go to the nearest village store, buy the largest tin of

powdered milk I can find and take it back to her. We explain she must use boiled water. It costs only $8 Australian to save that baby's life. Her eyes meet mine; we don't speak the same language, but we understand. I bless her for allowing me to help, and realise it's the giver who gains from the warmth of sharing.

"I also realise that I am learning so much in such a short time. The problems are real – you can't blot it out or turn off the TV. I realise it's not just giving money or aid: it's sharing. It's being realistic about the situation and doing something positive about it.

"There is a World Vision sewing class in that little Bangladesh village and the project staff encourage the mother of that baby to join. She will be able to earn some money from sewing. Her children will be sponsored and attend school and receive medical care.

"There is hope. Sponsorship does work. Poor people don't need our pity – they need our understanding. We do not help because we are privileged; we help because it is a privilege."

EMMA Lovell had an epiphany at the age of 17 when working in a part-time job as a waitress.

The high school student realised that her tips for the week could sponsor a World Vision child for a month.

"I remember after seeing World Vision ads that I'd ask Mum and Dad if we could sponsor a child and they'd put me off by saying 'it's a big thing for the family to take on'. I always thought that when I had money of my own I would become a sponsor.

"Then when I saw how much I had in tips I decided to take the plunge. I went to school the next day, got onto the library computer and flicked through the photos on the World Vision site until my little boy came up. I used Mum's credit card to sign on and then paid her back."

Emma became a devoted child sponsorship supporter and took on the role of a World Vision blog ambassador to further the cause.

She has visited her sponsored children, Lazaro in Tanzania and Kamala in Nepal.

"Lazaro belongs to the Maasai tribe in a remote area in the middle of nowhere and we had to ride over rocky roads for an hour and a half to get there," said Emma. "It was the polar opposite to everything I knew and it

changed my direction and world view completely."

Lazaro's mother was in her thirties but already had six children and one of her children was already pregnant.

"I cried hearing about Lazaro's life and how different it was to mine. His family were goat herders and I realised how effectively World Vision was working to make their lives better. They didn't need a TV or a big football stadium. What they needed was to continue living in their huts with basic things such as water and medical care.

"I realised that you can't make the Third World the First World. You just have to get people the basic needs they deserve."

Emma had been sponsoring Kamala in Nepal for 10 years when she had a chance to meet her in person.

"I had been to Nepal once before and loved it – but I also knew there was a need for NGO support there. I couldn't wait to go there again and knew there was probably an opportunity for me to meet my sponsor child at some point."

That chance came when Emma led a team of World Vision supporters on an Inspired Adventures Trek to Mount Everest Base Camp.

"At first, meeting Kamala was overwhelming and a tad confusing. We arrived to her school and there were hundreds of kids looking at me, as could be imagined. They knew there was a visitor coming and were very excited but I didn't realise there would be so many people and wasn't sure when or where I would see her.

"I was standing amongst lots of little kids and smiling and looking around when a girl came towards me from my right side and boldly stuck out her hand and said, 'Hello.' I shook her hand and smiled, asking the project manager, 'Excuse me, is this my sponsor child?' 'Yes,' he said. I clutched my chest as a wave of emotion rushed over me and the tears just came. I couldn't help it.

"I knew it would be a big day but I didn't expect it to overcome me in this way. Her mother, father, grandmothers and siblings had walked up behind her. I was introduced to them and her mother cried too. Her grandmothers touched my face and hair and held onto my hands tight. I just kept smiling and shaking my head in surprise."

During the trip, Emma was able to visit a number of projects outside of the

school where Kamala studies. There was an Early Childhood Development Centre, where mothers can take their young children and learn how to best care for them. She met a local government healthcare worker whose daughter was also a volunteer with World Vision.

"We then went to a local office working with community health programs and outreach centres. We even got to visit one of the newly-built centres where mothers can take their children for check-ups and people can get vaccinations and health updates. It's great to see the community there involved in the projects and wanting to see improvements."

Emma also took part in a blog ambassador trip to Uganda to see the work of World Vision firsthand.

"My favourite part was how welcoming the communities were. They were so happy for us to be there and to show us what they were doing with the support of World Vision. They literally say 'You are welcome' every time you arrive somewhere. They run over and shake your hand, introduce you to as many people as possible and more than likely sing a song for you. It was such a warm and wonderful vibe.

"The most interesting thing I learnt about on the trip was about biogas. I am not a science person and, when we got to the farm with biogas, I was a bit lost. We got to a farm and met a lovely man and his children. He showed us to a site and how he was using manure to improve the growth of his vegetables and the system he had for filtering it and getting it to the crops. We then went into the house and saw a gas stove. He placed a kettle on it and it boiled, all through the power of manure and biogas.

"It was a joy to meet this man and his family and see how World Vision could change his life."

Emma also visited an outdoor immunisation outreach program where hundreds of children and their parents were sitting to wait for their health checks and immunisations. She ended up in tears.

"I wasn't crying out of sadness but because of the good that was happening around me," she said.

"Seeing how your contributions are changing their life is life changing for you too. I get teary just thinking back on it. It gives you tingles all over. It makes you realise the world is so much bigger than us. There is so much more out there and we are just a small part of it.

"But, as the Dalai Lama says, 'If you think you're too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito in the room.'"

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STARS WITH A CAUSE

WORLD Vision's celebrity ambassadors are a special bunch, not because of their fame but because of their passion for wanting to make the world a better place.

It's not an easy job. And certainly not glamorous. The World Vision ambassadors have travelled to the poorest parts of the world to bring attention to global poverty with short films and documentaries.

"We're not turning up on private jets to well-lit shoots," said Dale Amtsberg, World Vision's manager of events and ambassador programs until early 2016.

"It's real and gritty. It's uncomfortable hotels and long car rides but that's part of the experience for our ambassadors. They get to see the reality of life."

World Vision's 15 ambassadors – who include Hugh Jackman, Deborra-Lee Furness, Jessica Gomes, Guy Sebastian, Rebecca Gibney, Melissa Doyle and Tracey Spicer – freely give their time to help tell the story of World Vision's work.

"We first started working with celebrities in the 70s," said Dale.

"We went through a phase in the early to mid-80s where we had a really good relationship with Channel Nine and they used to send celebrities our way. It was the age of our TV specials and telethons so we had a lot of Channel Nine people we worked with. That's how Rebecca Gibney came into our orbit and we still have a relationship with her 25 years later.

"We've done some work with *Neighbours* stars. In the 80s, the 40 Hour Famine actually got mentioned in the block lines of *Neighbours*. Into the 90s we started to pick up some journos like Mel Doyle and Tracey Spicer.

"One of the latest World Vision ambassadors is supermodel Jessica Gomes, the face of David Jones. The people who are following her and listening to her are not usually reached by our existing ambassadors. It's a new media space for World Vision. We're now getting mentions in

magazines like *Harper's Bazaar* and you wouldn't get that with any other ambassadors. It's a high end, glossy end of the celebrity stakes.

"She's opened up some important doors for us."

The selection of a World Vision ambassador is often a long process.

"We've refused people who wanted to work with us," said Dale. "Some people we don't think are a suitable alignment and some people we don't feel that, despite their enthusiasm, are worth investing years of our time in taking them on that journey to make them an empowered ambassador.

"We also want to make sure aligning with them is safe for the World Vision brand. We're a positive brand and we can't bring that into disrepute. We wouldn't look at someone like Charlie Sheen for example. My nightmare scenario is that I wake up in the morning and read that someone's been kicked out of a nightclub or gone into rehab and they say 'but I'm with World Vision'."

World Vision looks for celebrities who have a long-term profile and a long-term interest in social justice. These days, they also need to have a strong social media profile.

"About 15 to 20 years ago, we could take someone like Rebecca Gibney to see our World Vision work and at the end of that have some photos we could sell to a magazine and they'd probably put it on the cover and that would cover the cost of our trip," said Dale.

"The changing celebrity landscape is going in parallel with the changing media landscape, so the magazines and print outlets do not have the money they once had and they don't have the circulation they once had. Even the TV networks don't have the money they once had so we find more and more that social media is important for us.

"A celebrity who approaches us who has no social media presence at all, we would question whether that was a valuable proposition.

"We recently launched our appeal for our work fighting Ebola. We went to our ambassadors and made information and images for them and asked them to tweet and post on Instagram and Facebook and the reach for that was about five million people across the various posts that each of them engaged with. That's the power of social media.

"Your average celebrity in Australia would probably get requests from charities about once a week. Our way of working, when approaching a new

person, is looking for long-term relationships. The nature of celebrity has changed.

“We need to be creative about the way we tell the story.

“We find that more and more that our relationship with celebrities is not just a personal relationship but also a relationship with their own organisations. So Melissa Doyle is an ambassador for us but also an ambassador for Jetstar. So there’s a relationship between the three parties. And it’s the same with Hugh Jackman and Deborra-Lee, who started Laughing Man coffee with whom we have worked as well. And also Guy Sebastian and his wife Jules have their own foundation. So more and more it’s not just working with the individual celebrity but also their organisations.

“The best part of my job is to see how the ambassadors engage with the work. We’re very upfront about what it involves. They understand the nature of poverty and why we need to do the work we do.”

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REBECCA GIBNEY’S SPECIAL GIFT

LONG-TIME World Vision ambassador Rebecca Gibney, one of our most endearing actresses, remembers clearly the day she met up with her sponsored child, Barstone, in Malawi.

She gave the 15-year-old boy a bicycle and the African teenager gave her a live chicken named Hope.

“It was explained to me that the boy had named the chicken Hope because that’s what I had given him,” said Rebecca. “I had to quietly explain that I couldn’t take the chicken back to Australia, but that it would go to a very good home.

“I was so touched by that moment,” she said.

“He was just beside himself. You would have thought he’d won Tattslotto – and it was this old funny bike. And I got a chicken.”

Rebecca first met Barstone in his village when he was three.

“I remember asking him on the first trip what he wanted to be and he said ‘President of Malawi’. On the second trip, I asked him if he still wanted to be president and he said he now wanted to be a teacher. He had hopes of going back to teach in the village where he was raised to give children an

education and a better life. All through World Vision sponsorship."

Rebecca, who has had acclaimed roles in many Australian TV series, has been a World Vision ambassador for more than three decades. It is a role that she describes as a privilege.

"It started when I was in *The Flying Doctors* and some of the cast members had been doing some work with World Vision. And I said at the time, 'I've always wanted to do something like that.'

"Because, basically, I was raised in a household where if you didn't eat your meal Mum would say 'there are struggling people overseas who would give their right arm for what you have'.

"I was always very aware that there were people less fortunate than myself. For some reason, Africa was somewhere I had always had an affinity with.

"So I contacted World Vision and said, 'I'm happy to do anything,' and they took me up on that. I've been on many trips to Africa but also throughout Asia and it's been an extraordinary experience.

"I wasn't raised with a silver spoon in my mouth. I grew up in a transient lifestyle where we were always in rented accommodation and always moving, so I wasn't someone who was used to luxuries as such.

"But it's not until you go overseas and come to Third World countries and see how people are living that you understand the reality.

"It's very in your face and it's incredibly confronting. But in a good way I think because it does make you thankful for what you have.

"It's only by the grace of God I was born where I was. I asked one of the World Vision directors I travelled with, 'How do you stay sane doing this because you come into contact with so much suffering on such a grand scale?' And he said, 'If I was in their position I would hope that someone would come and try to help me because we are all connected.'

"I think that's always stuck with me – our connectedness to each other on the planet.

"On one of my first trips, I ended up in Vietnam before it had become the tourist destination of choice. We had secret police travelling with us because we were up on the Ho Chi Minh trail and going into areas where not many Westerners had previously been.

"I found that incredibly confronting because there were a lot of children in

villages suffering missing limbs from landmines. Malaria was rife and there were a lot of sick children.

“It was also confronting to talk to villagers who didn’t even know there had been a war on. They were living normal lives and then bombs would drop from the sky and they didn’t know what it was about. They just lost their homes and families. That was my reality eye-opener.

“I went to Africa, on the border of Somalia, during the AIDS crisis and in one of the camps we visited they were losing up to 200 children a day from malnutrition. I held a baby that ultimately died and that memory has stayed with me forever.

“I couldn’t wrap my head around the notion that they were dying because they had nothing to eat when we had so much. I just struggled to comprehend it.

“We have so much in the Western world and they don’t. Why aren’t we fixing it?

“You would go mad if you didn’t realise that you can do what you can do. If I can raise awareness so one person sponsors a child or one person helps provide a well for a village or provides an education, then I’m doing as much as I can.

“What continues to inspire me is that the people who work for World Vision have an attitude and absolute faith and commitment to making the world a better place. They wake up each day and approach the coming day with complete joy.

“They know that in this moment they will try to do the best they can to help others and that’s the philosophy I believe we all need to live by. Today is all we have, so let’s make it the best we can to help others. Sometimes it’s with a smile or a hug and just listening to someone who is struggling.”

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A JOYFUL SACRIFICE

KEVIN Gray estimates that about 80 percent of his friends and relatives advised him against working for World Vision.

Back in the early 70s, Kevin was then a chartered accountant and a rising star at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

“This is crazy; think of all you are throwing away,” said a friend after hearing that Kevin had answered an ad to work with the aid agency.

“But I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life making rich people richer and I wanted to make a purpose for my life,” Kevin said.

“I saw the ad and thought and prayed about it. The sacrifices in terms of image, reputation, friends and professional networks were pretty high.

“I gave up a lucrative career in chartered accounting. But I know I did the right thing because I followed God’s calling on my life.”

Kevin Gray spent 30 years with World Vision Australia, mostly as chief financial officer. He started with World Vision in 1976, when the income was $4 million, and left in 2006 when it was $400 million.

“It was a steady and consistent change,” he said. “We used to double our income every three or four years. In 1976, we were number four in the overseas aid category. People like Save the Children, Red Cross and Austcare used to look down on us and regard us as an American upstart. But we’re as Australian as anybody.

“When we started we had unassisted name recognition of about six percent in Australia. If I came to you and asked you to name the largest Australian overseas aid organisations and you named World Vision, that would be an example of unassisted name recognition.

“So ours was six percent unassisted name recognition at the start and within 10 years it was 70 percent.”

Kevin once organised a cross-section budget study that looked at charitable giving to World Vision over a number of years superimposed on average weekly earnings and GDP for the same years.

“In years like 1984, when unemployment was over 10 percent it was also one of greatest years of growth in World Vision Australia. We weren’t a recession-resistant industry; we were a recession-proof industry.

“Our money would actually go up in recessions and down in boom years. When the stock market was rising, our giving would taper off.

“It was the poor people who responded. We did group interviews with people and sometimes we’d ask, ‘You’re without a job but still sponsoring a child. Why?’

“And they would tell us, ‘That’s my child. I’ve got three kids and that one

over there in Asia is my child as well.'

"The wealthy often don't know what it is to be hungry or in need or desperate. They don't know what it is to lie awake at night worrying if you can feed your kids tomorrow.

"And yet there were sponsors who had lost their jobs but were still concerned about feeding their sponsor kids as well as their own kids."

Kevin has seen periods when donors have suffered compassion fatigue.

"It's an occasional thing but if you can keep retelling the story in an up-to-date way and don't resort to clichés, the credibility is retained and responsiveness is still there.

"I didn't always agree with people I worked with in World Vision, and some I didn't get on all that well with, but we all always made sure that we were working towards the same things. We respected each other's professional skills.

"World Vision Australia is a remarkable organisation that has had the right people at the right time. It's God-driven. Nothing else can explain it."

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WOOING THE CHURCHES

WORLD Vision Australia's first connections to the Australian community had been through the churches. Bernard Barron had early on emphasised the importance of the churches in "winning confidence" in the organisation's ministry.

But as World Vision became more successful, some church leaders came to resent the influence of the "newcomer". There were even suggestions that World Vision's blossoming child sponsorship program was taking money away from traditional church incomes.

CEO Harold Henderson employed Rowland Croucher, a well-known and highly-respected pastor who had led Blackburn Baptist Church, the first megachurch in Australia with more than 1,000 members.

Blackburn Baptist, later to become Crossway Baptist Church situated directly opposite to World Vision's headquarters, had started as a small Christian gathering in the homes of current CEO Tim Costello's parents and their friends.

Rowland Croucher's official title was Domestic Ministries Consultant. His job was to build strong relationships with Australian churches.

"I came in to do one of the most challenging jobs," said Rowland. "I felt a call to work with pastors and I said, 'I don't care what I do as long as I don't have to report to an office.'

Rowland and his assistant Grace Thomlinson established strong connections with churches through face-to-face meetings, seminars and production of a quarterly World Vision letter named Grid. It went out to every pastor and church leader on the World Vision database and had a huge impact.

"Through Grid and face-to-face meetings, there was a sea change in the attitude of churches towards World Vision," recalled Rowland.

Grace Thomlinson, who was to work for World Vision for 28 years, recalled the early challenges.

"In the early days the churches were very supportive of World Vision. But there came a time where we became successful through our marketing scheme at connecting with the general public and I think from inside World Vision there was a view for quite a few years that we were doing well in the general market and it was a lot of effort to get people to give money through churches.

"Christians were giving money but not always through churches. So it was felt that it wasn't worth putting the effort into going out to churches to raise money.

"That was where Grid became a useful tool because it did connect churches with World Vision. We typically produced 16,000 copies of Grid, sometimes 23,000."

Grace said there was a period in the 1990s when she felt the churches didn't feel cared about and the messages that were coming out from World Vision didn't appear Christian enough.

"Externally that probably was true. It was a choice to present ourselves that way for a period of time. Although internally it was never true.

"I think there was some frustration from inside World Vision from people who wanted to connect more with the churches. The resources for sending people out to talk to churches were reduced. That probably lasted for about a decade and it was quite challenging. In more recent years that has been

resourced better and there has been more connection with the Christian public.

"It was a challenging job; I spent a lot of time fighting over keeping the Christian ethos and connection with the churches. It was worth it and I think we are now seeing the fruit of those barren years."

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PEOPLE OF "THE BOOK"

WORLD Vision's Christian identity underpins everything that it does. It is an organisation motivated by faith and committed to following the teaching and example of Jesus Christ in His identification with those who are poor, vulnerable or forgotten.

But World Vision does not discriminate based on race, religion, gender or otherwise. The work isn't about proselytising or converting people – in fact, to do so would compromise the ability to work in many regions of the world.

In practical terms, this means working with people of all cultures, faiths and genders to achieve transformation. Maintaining a Christian identity while upholding the principles of sensitivity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

As CEO Tim Costello said: "We don't engage in proselytism, and we work cooperatively with people of all faiths and those without a faith. In fact, World Vision has more Muslim employees than any other NGO in the world, including Muslim NGOs. We strive to serve people everywhere without regard to their race, religion or politics."

Dave Waters, pastoral care manager at World Vision Australia, remembers seeing the fruits of that commitment while sitting around a big table with 12 Muslim leaders in a place called Jinnak, about 400 kilometres inland from Dakar in Senegal, a nation where only three percent of the population are Christian.

"I said, 'Do you realise World Vision is a Christian organisation?' And they said, 'Yes.' I asked, 'What does that mean to you?' And they said, 'Well it means you are people of The Book. It means you try to live out the teachings of Jesus.'

"I said, 'That's great. Tell me about the other NGOs here,' and they said,

‘There are no other NGOs here.’

“Then Mustafa, who was the head man – an old craggy man with a beautiful face – said through a translator, ‘There are other NGOs but we don’t trust them because they are not faith-based.’

“The learning coming out of the United Nations is that the best development happens through a faith context. Organisations like World Vision that come from a faith perspective are going to have the better development outcomes.”

In Senegal, Dave met a child who up until the age of 10 hardly left his little hut.

“He had some sort of cerebral palsy that the village thought came from the devil,” said Dave.

“A local pastor came and prayed for the kid and there was an instant change. The kid had no physical ailment, no mental ailment and was able to talk for the first time. It was unbelievable. As a Westerner I was thinking rational but the whole community had witnessed what had happened and they had faith that it was a miracle.

“This was a Muslim town that changed because of this pastor coming and the village became a Christian place. You hear of miracles all the time in places like that.

“If your hope is in something spiritual, it can’t be taken away from you. I’ve sat with people so many times who have been in horrible situations and they talk about being blessed. They love their community. We don’t have the same level of community in the West.”

Dave Waters also witnessed the negative side of community while talking with other local leaders in Senegal.

“There was a woman there who was very sharp, a very smart lady. At the end of our meeting the president of the community, a very tall man, said, ‘You take that lady home to Australia. She can be your wife.’ I said, ‘I already have a wife.’ He asked me how many wives I had and I replied, ‘Just one.’

“He said, ‘I’ve got four.’ I said, ‘I can’t take this woman. What would her husband say?’ Then he told me, ‘She hasn’t got a husband because she can’t have children. So really she means nothing to our community.’

“Even though she was a very intelligent and well educated woman, she was

considered useless to her community. She didn't say anything. She just stared straight ahead during this conversation.

"I've seen lots of disasters but I often see that lady's face in my mind. Just because she could not have kids she was seen to be of little value. And I often imagine what Jesus would say to her. What would Jesus do for her? And in many ways I would have loved to have brought her to Australia. I often wonder what has happened to her."

MELBOURNE couple Dr Bernadette Taylor and Dr Anthony McGowan have travelled across four continents to visit their many sponsored children.

Bernadette began sponsoring one little boy in Bangladesh named Hajong in 1975 after being impressed by the stories told by members of the Korean Children's Choir on an Australian tour.

"I thought it was wonderful to hear what World Vision was doing for children in need and decided to be a part of it," said Bernadette.

Over the years, the couple have sponsored many more children – so many they don't exactly know how many – to adulthood.

In a big box kept in their Melbourne home, the couple have kept letters, cards and drawings from the sponsored children they have cared for over 35 years.

The couple have travelled extensively to witness World Vision's work in some of the poorest communities, including to Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Lebanon, Brazil and Sri Lanka.

They travelled to Bangladesh to meet Hajong. The boy was brought by bus and train from his remote border village with his father. He had never before seen cars, planes or high-rise buildings.

"He was absolutely overwhelmed, especially when a plane went over the city," said Bernadette. "We went to the local market and bought presents for his mother, sister and little brother."

Later they travelled to Brazil to meet their sponsored child Diego. "He was a beautiful young man," said Bernadette. In Sri Lanka, the couple attended one of their former sponsored children's 18th birthday. In Ethiopia they visited their daughter's sponsored child.

"We have been privileged to be able to see World Vision's wonderful work in so many places," said Bernadette.

Bernadette and Anthony are passionate about helping. They have spoken at many Probus and Lions Club meetings to educate people about global poverty and promote the work of World Vision.

THE 1980s

The Cold War ended with the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall and the parting of the Iron Curtain. Disasters included the eruption of Mount St. Helens, the oil spill of the Exxon Valdez, a huge poison gas leak in Bhopal, the discovery of AIDS and the epic Ethiopian Famine. Culturally, the 1980s saw the introduction of the Rubik's Cube toy, Pac-Man video games, and Michael Jackson's Thriller video. Bob Hawke came to power, Australia won the America's Cup and Advance Australia Fair became our national anthem.

World Vision's disaster response and long-term community development became increasingly important. A growing number of international support offices expanded the organisation's global reach and capacity. The "welfare" approach changed to a more collaborative relationship and poor, marginalised people and communities worked with World Vision to improve their lives and take control of their futures. Well-drilling began in many communities, resulting in lower infant mortality rates.

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ETHIOPIA'S IMPENDING CRISIS

THE first signs of the massive calamity in Ethiopia were the sick cows. There were fewer trees and fewer livestock of any kind in the fields as the spectre of a major disaster fell over southern Ethiopia in the middle of 1984.

Australian field worker Ian Curtis and African relief director Russ Kerr came across what seemed to be catastrophic effects of a major drought in June of that year. The Ethiopian Government seemed unable or unwilling to deal with what the World Vision workers knew was an impending crisis.

They found a large tin hut with a couple of Catholic nuns and about 200 children, all malnourished. After arranging for food to be sent, the emergency aid workers asked local staff what was happening.

"They said it was just the usual drought that comes around in cycles," said Ian Curtis. "But this was way beyond anything you'd describe as normal. We realised it was probably countrywide.

“We were gobsmacked and angry at our staff for not seeing the obvious signs. You’d drive through the marketplace and there was nothing on sale. We noticed the cows weren’t in great shape either.

“I said to Russ, ‘How do you cope when you see this day in and day out in different countries in Africa?’ He said, ‘You never stop being angry and it never gets any better. The day it does I’ll take a plane back home. You just want to walk around and smash your fist into someone’s face because it is so preventable.’”

Ian Curtis was later to witness the full horror of the situation in the food camps.

“You’d wake up in the mornings and all you’d you hear in the camp was women keening over their kids or someone who’d died in the night. This wail froze you through to your marrow. And the sound of shovels burying dead before the sun came up. You had dazed fathers walking around with small children.

“I remember once going in the afternoon to a hut with a little old lady inside and I said the normal greeting – ‘How are you?’ – and I could see she was close to death.

“She said, ‘I’ll be ok,’ and quoted me this verse in a psalm that says: ‘For I will never leave you. I will never let you starve to death.’ The next morning she was dead. I’ve never read that psalm in the same way since that day.

“This sort of thing impacts you and you have to let it impact you but you can’t let it rule you.”

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THE WORLD AWAKES TO A “BIBLICAL FAMINE”

THE shocking TV news footage opened in the grey half-light of a chill Ethiopian morning with a slow panning shot of thousands of the emaciated dying – many of them shrunken skeletal children wrapped in rags.

Overhead, vultures and carrion storks – known locally as “undertaker birds” – circled patiently, waiting for the dead in Korem, a small hillside village in northern Ethiopia that in October 1984 had become the epicentre of the worst famine in modern times.

The startling vision was accompanied only by soft wailing and groaning.

Then, the measured and powerful commentary of BBC reporter Michael Buerk began:

“Dawn. As the sun breaks through the piercing chill of night on the plain outside Korem, it lights up a biblical famine – now in the 20th century. This place, say workers here, is the closest thing to hell on earth.

“Thousands of wasted people are coming here for help. Many find only death. They flood in every day from villages hundreds of miles away, dulled by hunger, driven beyond the point of desperation.

“Fifteen thousand children here now – suffering, confused, lost. Death is all around. A child or an adult dies every twenty minutes. Korem, an insignificant town, has become a place of grief.”

Long before satellite TV, social media and YouTube, this extraordinary BBC news item from Ethiopia, first broadcast on British TV on 23 October 1984, went viral – transmitted by 425 television stations worldwide. The graphic images, shot by African cameraman Mohammed Amin, and Buerk’s unforgettable words, shocked a complacent world into action.

Bob Hawke, then Australia’s Prime Minister, saw the six-minute news report on the ABC. By the end, he was in tears.

On the other side of the world, singer Bob Geldof watched the BBC report in horror. He didn’t cry; he became angry. He inspired celebrity conscience, cajoling a host of pop stars into gathering together to form the Live Aid concerts, and persuaded millions of people to part with their money to help the starving.

A catalyst for all this was Australian doctor Tony Atkins, then leading relief work for World Vision in Ethiopia.

At the time, the Ethiopian Government had denied journalists access to the north of the country in an attempt to keep the rapidly worsening impact of the famine hidden from their own people – and from the rest of the world.

Michael Buerk and Mohammed Amin, stuck in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, were desperate to see what was happening in Korem – hundreds of kilometres away in a war zone. No charter planes would fly there and the only other way seemed to be several days’ car journey on terrible roads.

Tony Atkins had heard that the BBC crew was desperate to cover the story. He struck a deal, hoping to expose the plight of the starving, and allowed the BBC crew to hitch a ride on World Vision’s twin-engine light plane that

was ferrying supplies to remote regions.

World Vision pilot Keith Ketchum later related that he was a little miffed when orders came down to take BBC reporters, rather than food, to those northern communities. But the BBC wanted to go there, and World Vision was willing to take them.

“We despised journalists because they each weighed 70 to 75 kilos,” said Keith, only half-joking. “So we’d have to leave behind a bag of grain.”

So for three days, two aviators shuttled BBC reporters Michael Buerk and Mike Wooldridge with cameraman Mohammed Amin in World Vision’s small, twin-engine plane between the capital city of Addis Ababa and the northern towns of Mek’ele, Korem and Alamata.

World Vision’s associate communications manager in Africa, the Sudanese journalist Jacob Akol, had been the first to alert the BBC to the disastrous famine. Frustrated by the lack of international response, he had taken a video camera into the worst-affected areas and filmed humans “dying like flies”. He took the shocking footage to the BBC’s East African headquarters and, soon after, the BBC responded by sending the team from London. It was also Jacob Akol who somehow managed to get the Ethiopian Government to grant permission for the journalists to fly with World Vision.

After the BBC journalists left and their reports went to air, Dr Atkins had no idea of the immediate and overwhelming reaction.

“We would listen to BBC news on short-wave radio but we didn’t have any other connections to the outside world,” he said. “But then we started to hear these reports of this amazing response.

“I think, while it was happening, that those of us on the ground really had no expectation that the world would pay much attention. I’d lived for the previous eight years in Sudan where a terrible war had gone on for many years and that was completely ignored – it was the forgotten war. Neglect by Western democratic nations or the whole outside world in what was happening in Africa was second nature to us I think.

“The response to Michael Buerk’s broadcasts and all that came out of it – Bob Geldof, Live Aid, Mother Teresa flying in, US senators flying in – was not planned. Because I don’t think any of us had much experience in the rest of the world taking notice of disasters.”

An estimated eight million people became famine victims during the

drought of 1984, and over one million died.

“It was an incredibly bleak situation,” said Dr Atkins. “You’d see a sea of faces – all these women with dying babies and old men. I’d go for a walk in the morning outside the fenced off area to select those who we could accommodate that day to incorporate into the feeding program. So you had to go out and choose who was going to live.”

World Vision Australia board member and future chairman David Jenkin recalled an early morning walk with Tony Atkins. “It was freezing cold,” he said. “I had not learnt that you can be super hot during the day and cold at night and the early mornings. When we arrived at the camp, Tony walked over to what I thought was a pack of nothing and it turned out to be a naked woman lying in what we would call the gutter.

“He said, ‘The reason she has no clothes is that she has given them to children standing outside the gate.’ Then he said, ‘I can save her.’

“I met the woman some time later and she was ok. She had been saved. The amazing thing was that children brought into the camp in a terrible state on the first day were running around having fun within three days. It was an unbelievable experience. It was life-changing.”

The publicising of the Ethiopian famine of 1984 was a watershed moment in humanitarian action. It created Live Aid and celebrity conscience. Disaster was televised, with images that would go on to define aid and development in the public consciousness, at least for some time.

Two years earlier, World Vision had sent Dr Atkins to Lebanon after Israeli troops had invaded. He was working in the Ein-el Halweh refugee camp near Sidon and one day wandered into the basement of a tenement building. In the basement he found dozens of bodies covered in lime.

“It was all these Palestinians who had hidden there and a bomb had come straight through the roof. There were bodies of old men, children and women and there was this hand coming up through the lime. I don’t know why but I took a photograph.”

Soon after, he was flying home to Australia on a British Airways flight that flew into a cloud of volcanic ash, shutting down all four engines. The plane fell from 32,000 to 10,000 feet before the crew finally restarted one engine and the aircraft limped into Jakarta Airport.

“I was anxious to get home so I asked the World Vision field rep in Jakarta

to get me on a plane and he did. I got home a day before the rest of the passengers on the volcanic ash flight.

"I arrived in Perth and there was this press conference set up. No-one had said anything to me about it and I hadn't organised my thoughts.

"I was welcomed not as the World Vision relief director, not someone coming out of the siege of Beirut, but as the first living body they could interrogate about this plane falling out of the sky.

"I answered spontaneously. 'Well,' I said, 'this rather acrid gas came into the cabin and I thought, Holy Cow, some idiot has dropped a cigarette on the paper towels in the toilet and I expected to see the plastic melt on the wall in front of me.'

"This got on the front page of *The Sun*. I think the words 'Holy Cow' had not entered acceptable language within some parts of World Vision, in the US at least, and I was later told they were not entirely approved of."

34

RESTORING THE VALLEY OF DEATH

THE Antsokia Valley in Ethiopia was one of the worst-affected areas of the 1984 famine. This was where hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives. This parched dust bowl was known as the Valley of Death because all you could see was the dust blowing up into the sky. It was a totally dry, brown valley.

Three decades later, Antsokia Valley is lush with hectares of green crops. Cattle roam the valley floor and the town buzzes with market stalls and children playing in the streets. Its fate could have been far different but for the courage of one man: the wonderfully-named Girma Wondafresh.

In 1984, Girma was administrator of the Antsokia Valley area. His people were succumbing to famine largely brought on by severe drought. Hunger and cholera were taking a heavy toll among the population.

He wrote letters to his administrators 200 kilometres away telling them an urgent response was necessary. He told them that for months, on average 30 people – of all ages – were buried every day. Babies were dying for lack of breastmilk. They would die as mothers carried them on their backs. It was common to see their bodies thrown on the road or in the forest. The trees were dry and wildlife was lying dead out in the open fields. There was

no harvest, little food and a whole valley desperately needing to eat.

He received no response.

In desperation, he decided to go above the heads of his superiors and walked 25 kilometres to meet government officials. He was met by four security officers sent by the government, who accused him of being a rebel and threatened to arrest and perhaps shoot him.

Girma convinced the officials to instead come to Antsokia to see the reality of the famine.

He showed them the mass graves and the dying children and the elderly on the streets. The officials were convinced and called an emergency meeting in the capital, Addis Ababa. Girma made the journey of 220 kilometres, first by foot, walking out of the valley to the main road, then catching a bus. It was scorching hot on his trek and he had no water, but he shrugged it off: "The people I left behind were suffering. They were my only concern."

The administrative heads of 20 affected districts were instructed to attend. Girma was told to present the facts to them all. "It was my first time on such a stage," he said. "I prayed to God to give me the courage and wisdom to speak to these people." He talked, without notes, for 90 minutes.

"I spoke to 2,000 people. I explained that my people were starving and had nothing left. I mentioned one man, a farmer, who committed suicide because he did not want to see his children starving and dying. Suddenly they understood and everyone began to cry."

Afterwards, it was decided that Girma should have an immediate audience with the vice-president.

On the way back from the vice-president's office, Girma asked if any humanitarian organisations could offer urgent help. "I'd heard about one that was based in Kenya called World Vision," he said. He contacted the office.

World Vision acted quickly, sending aid workers to assess the situation. The emergency team decided that the valley was inaccessible because it could not be accessed by supply aircraft.

Girma said he would build an airfield. He hired an engineer to design it and marshalled thousands of people to contribute labour, often using their bare hands and feet to remove rocks and level the earth.

Within days, the airfield was completed and the first World Vision plane appeared on the horizon.

The airfield provided World Vision's entrée into Antsokia Valley. By 1984, it was one of eight locations that collectively fed more than 150,000 people a day and provided medical care for thousands more suffering from the kind of diseases that prey on weakened bodies: cholera, typhoid and malaria. "The number of people dying decreased, and people began to be saved from starvation," Girma says.

When the next phase of World Vision's work began, Girma proved again to be a valuable partner. He helped provide land for a demonstration farm – a testing ground for new farming methods and crops never before grown in the valley, such as sweet potato and cabbage. It was the seeds, tools and training provided to farmers that enabled families to fight their way back from the brink of death.

A tree nursery raised fast-growing eucalyptus for building materials and local tree varieties for controlling soil erosion. The nursery created hundreds of jobs by employing people to tend the grounds and pack tree seedlings in a special blend of alluvial soil and fertiliser, and millions of trees were planted across the valley.

World Vision planted 22 million seeds, dug eight reservoirs, laid 98 kilometres of water pipes, and built 12 schools and 4,000 latrines. Today, 90 percent of the people of Antsokia have been vaccinated against disease and 99.4 percent of the children are adequately nourished by World Health Organization standards. Three-quarters of the population has access to drinking water. The land is lush with mango, red onion, papaya, maize, bananas and oranges.

"World Vision belongs to Antsokia; Antsokia belongs to World Vision," said Girma. "We belong to each other."

Looking back, Girma said he never felt he would give up. "I had trust in God that he would help me. If I failed, my people would perish. It was God who helped me.

"I'm proud that my legacy was bringing World Vision to Antsokia. If it wasn't for World Vision's planes landing, we would not be here. Thirty years ago, our land was dry and our people were dying. Now our valley is full of life. I pray that World Vision can bring the same life and hope to others in need."

Dr Tony Atkins' attention had been particularly taken by one boy he had treated when Antsokia was still the Valley of Death.

"He had been seriously malnourished," he said. "To go back several years later and see this child transformed and living in a community that was going somewhere was fantastically encouraging. It brought tears to my eyes."

35

A REMARKABLE HONESTY

ACCORDING to some historians, Ethiopia was the first empire to convert to Christianity, even before Rome.

Christianity in Ethiopia dates to the 1st century AD, and this long tradition makes the nation unique amongst sub-Saharan African countries.

The earliest and best known reference to the introduction of Christianity is in the New Testament in the Book of Acts when Philip the Evangelist converted an Ethiopian court official shortly after the resurrection of Christ.

According to church historian Nicephorus, the apostle Matthew later preached the Christian Gospel to Ethiopia (then called Colchis) after having preached in Judea.

Ethiopia was one of the first countries to adopt Christianity as a state religion, long before Europe.

Ethiopia is a multicultural and multiethnic country with a rising Muslim population but about 62.8 percent of the people of Ethiopia are Christians, mostly belonging to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Religion is a major influence in Ethiopian life. Honesty is highly prized.

That national attribute had a profound effect on World Vision board chairman David Jenkin, in Ethiopia with Dr Tony Atkins during the 1984 famine.

"We flew into Abbis Abida and we were carrying quite a lot of relief food that had been dumped where we landed.

"I soon saw this dust in the distance and it was actually streams of people walking down the main highway. Soon I could see a truck coming to pick us up and I assumed we would put the food on board. But that didn't happen. I said, 'What's going to happen with all this food? Won't all these

people walking past take it?'

"Tony said, 'No, they would never do that.' I was impacted by that."

Aid worker Ian Curtis, also in Ethiopia at the time, was also impressed by the honesty of the Ethiopian people during the crisis.

"All the doors of our hotel were open all the time and we didn't lose a dollar. That doesn't happen in too many countries. The ethics and sense of morality was amazing. It was underpinned by the Orthodox Church. I had never come across anything like this before. And I haven't seen it since."

36

WHEN WORDS AREN'T NECESSARY

IAN Wishart and his World Vision team had finished for the day in an office near the Antsokia Valley in Ethiopia.

To wind down, he took a walk out the back as the sun was setting.

There was a small hut made out of sticks, some old plastic and grass at the back of the office. And sitting in front of the hut was a middle-aged woman who beckoned Ian.

"She spoke only one or two words of English but I knew she was saying 'sit and have some tea'," he said.

"So we sat together in silence and shared a cup of black tea.

"The woman was obviously dirt poor and had been ostracised because she was divorced.

"I'm still struck by the humanity of that woman. She had virtually nothing but shared what she had. She had a teapot and a bowl for boiling food and a few vegetables and one goat. She didn't ask for anything.

"On average, 99 percent of the time human beings are beautiful. It doesn't matter what religion or country they come from.

"That's why they deserve our support. They are sometimes born in circumstances where they are destitute and the least we can do is give them a helping hand and respect."

As an emergency response worker, Ian was at all the major crisis points – Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Rwanda and Cambodia – during the 90s.

He went on to become the director of World Vision Australia's emergency

response unit, then took a posting overseas as the country director for Laos, also for World Vision, before returning to be a strategic adviser to the then World Vision CEO. He is now CEO of Plan Australia.

It's a far cry from his earlier life as a child and later in big business.

Ian's teenage years were spent in Papua New Guinea, where he spent weekends exploring remote villages and meeting people living subsistence lifestyles without healthcare or clean water.

"I always vowed that I would help, but life took a completely different direction that was financially rewarding but it didn't feel like it was really me.

"I was in my late 20s and working for the oil giant Texaco and I thought, 'What the hell am I doing here?' This is not how I imagined I'd be spending my time. I just decided I wasn't going to do that anymore. Back in Australia I had no idea what to do and then I was introduced to World Vision.

"The first day I walked in the door I knew this was where I was meant to be. I'd never had that feeling before. It was worth following the dream.

"I've seen, over the years, the most unbelievable and extreme suffering anyone can see, whether it was the genocide in Rwanda or starvation in Ethiopia. It does affect you.

"There are slow-burners and fast-burners but there ain't no no-burners. So you have to be careful. There are people who go into a crisis and have an immediate reaction and can't cope. That can happen within months. Then there are people who cope well, seemingly, and are very effective but even those people, after years and years, get a lot of wear and tear.

"I'm a slow burner. So I made a decision post-Rwanda that I'd done intense emergencies for six years and made a decision to back off from this. I was seeing some of my buddies have issues with post-traumatic stress syndrome.

"You do get memories of things. I still have some conflicted feelings about emergencies. Should we have done more? Did we make the right decisions? But I don't regret my time with World Vision. I loved it."

Ian said the qualities needed for emergency aid work were "compassion for others, a great deal of patience and cross-cultural sensitivity and professional skills".

"Helping people overseas is not an amateur or purely volunteer thing. It's serious work where people's lives are at risk and it needs to be approached

with every skill and professional standard and experience that you can muster."

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THE WOMAN WHO INSPIRED BONO

NURSE Sue Germein was living "the good life" in Yorketown, outside Adelaide, when she saw a 1984 BBC documentary on the famine, drought and disease that had ravaged Ethiopia.

"I thought, 'Here we are working out who will be having crayfish for Christmas and these kids don't even have a crust of bread,'" she said.

"I made up my mind right then to go to Ethiopia to help. My friends thought this would be impossible but I was determined to be part of the Ethiopian lifeline."

Sue was well-qualified to work in Ethiopia. She had studied general nursing and midwifery at Adelaide's Queen Elizabeth Hospital and worked with the Flying Doctor service. Her mother had sponsored a World Vision child "since the beginning of time".

Working with a World Vision emergency medical team 600 kilometres north of Addis Ababa, Sue quickly confronted the reality of desperation.

"My workplace was a tent with 300 people suffering diarrhoea and vomiting," she said. "Seeing images on TV is not the same as being there. All your senses are fully immersed in the situation.

"I remember one of the first patients I met was an attractive young girl about 14 or 15. She was suffering from pneumonia and was extremely dehydrated. I listened to her chest, put a drip in her and she just looked at me and died. I can't forget the look of hopelessness in her eyes."

Sue found a special way to cope.

Every morning she would gently touch every one of the patients in her tent – a simple but profound act of compassion and respect.

"It was sometimes the only thing you could do for someone – just to touch. People would have their arms out as I passed. You could see the look of gratitude in their eyes.

"You see so much. You'd be feeding babies and they'd die in your arms.

"I was extremely strong when I look back on it. I didn't break down and cry

in front of people. I was there to do a job. It wasn't about me; it was about them. I was determined to do my best for the people we were looking after.

"These people were starving through no fault of their own. We felt the injustice of it all. The Ethiopians are such a noble people. No one pushed to get food or attention. People just sat and waited."

In 1985, Sue shared her experiences with an Irish couple who were invited by World Vision to come and see first hand what was happening in Ethiopia.

The man introduced himself as Bono and said he was lead singer for the band U2. Sue had not heard of Bono or the band.

Bono and his wife Ali went under the wire and worked as regular volunteers in charge of an orphanage in northern Ethiopia, in a feeding station at Ajibar.

Sue recognised the couple's passion for social justice.

"I began telling him about my experience with the Flying Doctors and the reasons I was in Ethiopia, my concerns, what I hoped to achieve. I explained the severity of the situation to him.

"He was genuinely caring; his sincerity is what struck me most."

Bono, Ali and Sue, talking together about how they could change the world, struck up an instant friendship that has lasted.

The U2 frontman revealed to Tim Costello after a "Make Poverty History" concert in Melbourne that the Australian woman's heartfelt commitment to social justice inspired him to become a champion against global poverty and the spread of AIDS.

"She was the woman that got me fired up about these issues," said Bono.

"She had a huge impact on me. Her passion changed my life."

Bono and Sue send each other Christmas cards. When U2 tours Australia, he sends tickets for Sue and her family. One year, Bono said he wanted to meet the family before a U2 show in Adelaide. They spoke for half an hour and Bono became so engrossed in the conversation that the show's starting time was delayed.

Sue is still committed to World Vision's work. Her three talented daughters, Ella, Clara and Georgia (who form the Indie-Pop band "Germein Sisters"), are ambassadors for World Vision Australia.

On returning to Australia, Sue had reverse culture shock and organised to return to Ethiopia as soon as her work in Australia allowed. “To return to Ethiopia and to be part of the move from relief to rehabilitation was satisfying. Seeing people well is good for the soul. Sharing knowledge and working in partnership with the local health staff is rewarding and when you see people with clean water, adequate nutrition, access to health care, safe shelter and education you realise that social justice is achievable.”

Sue was named as one of “The Ten Outstanding Young Persons of The World for 1987” for services to the Ethiopian people. (Jaycees International).

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GENTLY LEADING THE WAY

WHEN Philip Hunt became CEO of World Vision Australia, he posted an Asian poem on his office wall.

It read: “Go into the crowd. Live with them. Study together. Share in their ups and downs. Be in the same boat and help them build up themselves according to their understanding.

“Guide them in truth, so that they will practise what they have learned and not just become empty vessels. In doing so, you will become their true friend.

“Do not upset laws and orders, but discern what is the priority in life, then they will never regret. Be kind to all and gently lead the young until they accomplish their tasks and enjoy their fruition. So the people will say, ‘we achieved the goal ourselves’.”

It was a guiding philosophy that Philip Hunt put into action when he became CEO of World Vision Australia in 1989.

“I reckon that’s World Vision’s philosophy and certainly my management style, which is working with the people so that in the end they say ‘we did it ourselves’,” said Philip.

“The most effective development workers come alongside the communities and they have certain skills and knowledge that they give away. And in the best circumstance the communities come to own the knowledge themselves. We help people to grow.”

A former Brisbane disc jockey who joined World Vision Australia in 1976, Philip was not planning a long career in the overseas aid world when he responded to a job vacancy in the communications department.

Yet he was to become a highly effective communicator for the organisation.

“Philip Hunt saw the big picture,” said a former colleague.

“He had enough experience to know what we were on about. He did a lot of reading and encouraged people to read and go on the journey along with him.

“He caught people’s imagination and we were caught up with that vision. It was highly motivating for the organisation.”

“I’d been smart enough to put together a team that was fairly vigorous,” said Philip.

“My idea of getting ideas up was to put it out there and see if anyone picked it up and said, ‘This is a good idea. I’ll have this one.’ And so they own it. Nothing gave me more joy than if someone told me something I’d thought about before and maybe dropped into a conversation. Once people do that, they are empowered and make things happen.

“The thing I’m most proud of in my time as CEO is the great collection of people who worked there. When I look around at all the people who worked with me who are now in so many in places of influence and effectiveness. We gave them opportunities to grow and I’m proud of that.”

Philip once wrote to his staff in the internal newsletter *Trellis* about a typical conversation about World Vision’s work he had with a fellow passenger on a plane from Los Angeles to Australia.

The CEO wrote:

“His name was Andrew. He had a friendly smile, clean-cut looks, and the seat next to me on the plane. ‘What do you do?’ he asked. It’s the question everyone seems to ask once they know your name.

‘I work for World Vision.’

‘Great. I sponsor a child in Chad. We began sponsoring as something to influence the kids. My church also sponsors kids.’

How unusual, I thought, to meet an Aussie on a plane who actually goes to church.

After this, the questions came in a predictable pattern.

‘I’ve always wondered what happens about kids who are not sponsored. I mean, it seems a bit unfair to single kids out for special treatment.’

I gave him a mini-lesson in community development and participation.

‘That’s great to hear. What about that big building you have?’

I explained it was the cheapest building possible for an organisation of our size. Cheaper than any alternative.

‘I never realised World Vision was that size.’

‘No. People never do.’

And then, the question I was waiting for.

‘What about overheads? How much of the money really gets to the children?’

I answered him with the 70:30 goal, around six percent general admin, balance on fundraising, education, advocacy, etcetera.

I was getting tired. Seemed to me I had discussed these matters once or twice before. Although not with him.

There was a moment of mutual silence. I spoke. ‘What do you do?’

He was a doctor with the bone marrow unit of the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

‘Cool,’ I said, genuinely impressed. ‘That would be very satisfying work.’

‘Yes. Yours too.’

I agreed with a nod.

‘That’s got to do with leukemia and stuff hasn’t it?’ I asked.

He explained it to me rather better.

‘How do you decide which patients to treat?’ I asked.

It was clear the question confused him. He just treated the ones who came for treatment.

‘Uh-huh. I suppose you have all the latest equipment?’

‘Pretty much.’

‘Isn’t that wasteful? I mean I’ve always wondered about that.’

He defended well. After all, we are talking about human lives. I agreed there was no debate on that value.

‘What about administration? How much of the bone marrow unit is

overhead?'

He paused for a minute.

'I have no idea. I don't think I've ever been asked that question before. Why do you ask?'

'I don't know. Why did you ask me?'"

JOHN Williams' involvement with World Vision and a child named Pedrito started one Saturday night when he decided to develop a plan for life after retirement.

He linked onto the World Vision website and decided to sponsor a child. "I could see that my involvement could help someone's future and also the future of a whole community," he said.

"I decided to sponsor child a child in Mozambique as I was aware that they were recovering from a civil war and my monthly sponsorship would help. I never dreamt that would develop into such an enjoyable and life-changing experience in my retirement life."

A year later, John arranged through World Vision to visit his sponsored child Pedrito and his community "to see with my own eyes the issues that face them".

It was an emotional experience. Seeing Pedrito, the youngest of five brothers, that first time was heartbreaking for John. With water miles away and little food to eat but the mice he and his family would catch, Pedrito was struggling to survive.

"The first trip was extremely emotional as I saw poverty full on and it opened my eyes and heart," said John.

He wrote on his blog: "The last 48 hours have been unreal and it is so hard to put into words what I have experienced. It has been a very emotional experience and there is so much required to be done.

"I met Pedrito and his family and we exchanged gifts, visited his school, played football, soccer, cricket and shared a traditional meal that he has every day.

"The World Vision crew I had for the visit were great and they do so much with so few resources. The visit has opened my eyes, they even shed a lot of tears too, and it will change my outlook on life in the future."

John has since been to visit Pedrito and his community seven times.

With World Vision – and John's help – Pedrito is now thriving.

At the age of 10, the boy was about to drop out of school to become a full-time goat herder to support his family. Now his education is being sponsored by John and he plans to become a motor mechanic.

"My mother and stepfather now understand the importance of going to school," he explained. "They let me devote my time to school and revision. I no longer have to worry about grazing and selling goats and now I concentrate more on my studies," said Pedrito.

"Thanks to World Vision and my sponsor I go to school every day. I dream of becoming a good and successful mechanic so that I can help my family and my community."

At the school where Pedrito is studying, John introduced an annual sporting tournament named the Mr John Flying Kangaroo Cup.

"The cup has now been going for three years and everyone at the school is involved – we have football, soccer, basketball and volleyball," said John.

"There are no losers with the Mr John Cup. Everyone at the school gets something – competitors get hats or t-shirts and all students get an exercise book to assist their education.

"So over the years the sponsorship of one small boy has now helped and made so many people happy.

"What I enjoy most is seeing smiles on children's faces and little things go a long way and there is so much more to be done with this unfinished journey – the introduction of the Mr John Cup has involved a lot of people and created a lot of laughter and enjoyment.

"The Marara Project is where they live and they face many challenges every day. Most people are farmers, the soil is poor and droughts do not help.

"Many of the children are malnourished and are prone to malaria and anaemia. Sanitation is poor, resulting in infections and HIV is also widespread. The World Vision project is helping Pedrito and his family to get a more quality lifestyle and it will be great to see what is happening and what needs to be done."

John has seen many changes in Pedrito's village, such as new toilets and other hygiene improvements, better farming, wells, a credit union and improvements to education.

“Over the years, since I’ve been sponsoring this family – and as you sponsor the family you’re also sponsoring the village and the area – I’ve seen great improvements.” John said. To ensure this good work can continue he has included World Vision in his Will.

“What I wanted to do with my Will was to make sure that the boy I’m sponsoring has a good education, so I’ve included some more for his education and also some extra money for the village so that it can be improved over the years.”

“Each year I now make it an annual event to return and have received great satisfaction in seeing firsthand the work done by World Vision and improvements in health and education for the people in Marara.

“Through my visits I have been able to help Pedrito and his community, local schools with advice and support financially.

“I have visited numerous schools in the area and actively encouraged them with physical material so they can continue their work – dress material so that the school children could make school uniforms.

“I also have been privileged to meet members of the credit cooperative who have set up a bank for local communities.

“The local primary school was able to build a latrine and reduced the occurrences of malaria.

“About four years ago, I financed the building of a house for Pedrito and his family. The house consists of three rooms and replaces their thatched mud house.”

John said his sponsorship will continue for years to come.

“This sponsorship is going to go on for many more years because I regard it as an unfinished journey,” John said. “I’ve seen a boy who had nothing become someone who has a future.”

THE 1990s

The 1990s were marked by the end of the Soviet Union, the final collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, the first Gulf War and the Rwandan genocide. In Australia, John Howard’s government deployed Australian forces to East Timor and a referendum on becoming a republic was unsuccessful.

The collapse of Communism enabled World Vision to expand to former

Soviet-bloc areas. World Vision Australia led its partners in adopting comprehensive policies for the protection of children from potential sexual abuse in areas with World Vision-supported programs. Advocacy focused on ending child exploitation and banning the use of landmines. World Vision Australia played a major role in Australia being one of the first nations to sign the convention banning landmines in December 1997. As the focus shifted to Africa, World Vision provided food, medical care, and resettlement help to survivors of the Rwandan genocide. The work included successful long-term peacebuilding and reconciliation training between ethnic groups. A dedicated global rapid response team was formed to better respond to emergencies worldwide.

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ROMANIA'S FORGOTTEN CHILDREN

SOPHIE'S Choice is not just a fantasy. In Romania, choosing which of your children to save and which to give away was a terrible reality under the reign of President Nicolae Ceausescu.

Ceausescu's bizarre plan was to boost the population, with the ultimate aim of creating a citizens' army. Contraception and abortion were banned, and women were told that having a large family was a patriotic duty. Women who had less than five children were taxed heavily.

The result was that parents had more children than they could afford to feed. Struggling families were forced to place some of their children in state-run institutions. These "orphanages" did not have the resources to care for such a huge wave of unexpected children, and were unable to properly feed, house and care for them.

It was only after the fall of Ceausescu's regime, following a bloody uprising in December 1989, that the appalling truth was revealed.

About 170,000 babies and children, including the physically and mentally disabled, whose existence Ceausescu had denied, had been crammed into more than 700 "orphanages". An estimated 3,000 were infected with HIV.

The horror and inhumanity of Romania's orphanages were first revealed to the world via television.

Late in 1990, Jana Wendt's report for *A Current Affair* showed images of emaciated children locked in Romania's stark orphanages. The children,

many of whom were female or disabled, were dumped by their parents and starved of love and attention. They were filmed naked, rocking backwards and forwards and crying in their soiled cots.

The report showed some young children in straightjackets, groups of mentally disturbed adolescents spending their days in bleak rooms sitting in eerie silence, and babies nearly starving to death.

Jana Wendt rang World Vision Australia executive Ian Curtis and told him the station would air the report and broadcast World Vision's phone number at the end for viewers who wanted to donate funds to help the Romanian children.

"She asked if we could handle that and I said we could," said Ian. "We got a few extra people in to handle the calls but the phones went berserk all that night and the next day. Within 48 hours we had raised $2 million."

World Vision was one of the first humanitarian organisations to respond to the dire needs of institutionalised children in Romania.

The child protection and childcare models World Vision launched proved so effective that the Romanian Government adopted them throughout the country.

Ian Curtis visited Romania in 1991. "I was amazed at how backwards the country was," he said. "There was only one light globe in the rooms."

"A lot of Australians from World Vision went to Romania to help out around that time. Basically World Vision helped to write the legislation for child care in that country."

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KEN DUNCAN SEES THE BIG PICTURE

WORLD-RENOWNED photographer Ken Duncan was capturing images of children dying of AIDS in Romania when he met "this really cool kid" named Alexandria.

Alexandria had contracted the disease after his mother had a blood transfusion. He was only a child and yet he was dying.

Ken had been asked to photograph Alexandria to bring the message home about AIDS. It was emotionally a difficult assignment.

"He'd come into consciousness and his grandparents and parents would

say ‘hello’,” said Ken. “His last word was ‘chocolate’ and then he passed away.

“So I photographed all that through tears.”

Soon after, Ken visited a state-run Romanian orphanage where many children were dying of AIDS. He wasn’t allowed to take photographs.

“I walked in and straight out because the smell of faeces was overpowering. But I went back in.

“There were 150 kids rocking back and forth in these cots. They told me it was an ‘institution disease’ because the kids didn’t have love and affection.

“These children were put there because the authorities thought there was no hope for them. They got changed once a day. Toys had been given but the nurses stole the toys for their own children.

“Then the World Vision people came in and really made a difference. World Vision started to take the hardest cases and had huge results with some kids, getting them functioning and instilling some hope. I often think the World Vision people in the field are like angels.”

Straight after Romania, Ken Duncan flew to LA to shoot a book called *A Day In The Life of Hollywood*.

“I was shooting some of the so-called rich and famous,” he said.

“I met a very wealthy man – a huge name I won’t reveal – and he took me around his home in Beverly Hills. The bed was like a football field. It was over-the-top opulence. He showed me all his possessions and his kid’s two-storey cubby house that had its own maid.

“I lost it. I said, ‘You need to get a reality check. This is obscene. One day you’re going to be standing before God and give an account of what you’ve done with your wealth. And you telling Him you bought a two-storey cubbyhouse is not going to cut it.’

“No-one had ever spoken to him like this before. I spent all night talking to him about reality checks. I hope it changed him.”

Ken first became involved in World Vision through his wife Pam, who he describes as “a 40 Hour Famine person and ruthlessly so”.

“I’d always been sceptical about money getting to the right places,” said Ken. “World Vision said, ‘Come and take some photos and we’ll show you.’ I thought that’s pretty good so after that I was converted, I realised they

were doing an amazing job."

Ken said seeing such depths of poverty for the first time and hearing the heartbreaking stories of the people he met had been life changing.

"Those first trips that I took with World Vision opened my eyes about global poverty and put my own life into perspective," he said.

Ken is best known for his majestic and awe-inspiring landscape photos. His work has been published in more than 50 books worldwide, including *Vision of Hope: Mother and Child*, a beautiful collection of images celebrating the universal bond between mother and child. Proceeds go towards supporting World Vision's work to transform lives in some of the world's poorest communities.

The book was inspired by a trip Ken took with Tim Costello to the slums of India in 2010.

"It was quite surreal," said Ken. "The Commonwealth Games were on and there were signs saying 'Australia is going for gold'. Meanwhile there were two million children on the streets being sold into slavery, and then I saw the work women were doing with AIDS patients and others. Mothers are the ones who do the majority of the nurturing and this book gives you a glimpse of the bond that mothers and children share around the world.

"It's not a book full of sorrow; it's a book of people with incredible stories who make you realise what you can do to bring about change – it's a book of hope."

Despite all the awards and praise for his work, Ken Duncan is a humble man.

"I'm an average photographer with a great God," he said. "My job is to bring peace into people's lives. If you put one of these landscapes in your house, the one that speaks to you, it's amazing how over the years you'll just go 'wow'. It's not because it's about me; it's because you're looking at a slice of God's creation; a moment in time. It has the ability to touch you.

"I've travelled extensively with World Vision. I find it good to shoot these places because it brings me back to reality.

"I see World Vision going into places working on aid and educational projects and see the light shining in the darkness.

"I do believe World Vision transforms lives. We see different things on the news and we get overwhelmed and inactive. I think people need to see

images that convey it so that they are not able to pretend nothing is happening.

“We all need to genuinely help to make a lasting difference. Wouldn’t it be great if Australia became known as the biggest giver to the world? Wouldn’t that be lovely?

“I believe World Vision would love to become redundant so let’s help them become redundant.”

41

MARCHING OFF THE MAP

A QUARTER of a century ago, Stan Mooneyham gave an extraordinary speech at a lunch for board and staff at World Vision International in California. Stan was to die less than four months later but his words continue to inspire World Vision’s work around the world.

This is the edited text of that speech delivered on 13 March 1991.

If I had to choose one story to illustrate 40 years of World Vision’s history, it would not be a contemporary story; it wouldn’t come from those 40 years. It wouldn’t even come from this century. It would come from the first century BC. The story may be apocryphal, it could well be true. It happened in the days when map-making was a very rudimentary and inexact science because so much of the world was unexplored and unknown. When the map-makers were drawing their maps, they represented all the area that was outside of their scope of knowledge with symbols of dragons and monsters and big fish.

In other words, this was territory uncharted, unknown, terrifying and, if possible, to be avoided. But one adventurous commander of Roman soldiers found himself in that territory beyond which the map-makers had drawn. Now, he didn’t want to turn around and go back, but neither did he want to pursue his course without further instruction. So, he dispatched a messenger back to Rome with the urgent request, “Please send new orders, we have marched off the map.”

I would characterise the history of World Vision as being an organisation that is constantly marching off the map! Now, let me illustrate what I mean by that. From my earliest experiences with World Vision, we have seen that there were always new things to be dared, innovative things to be

experienced, risky things to be explored. When Bob Pierce dared to take one little child in China and provide her with food, he marched right off the map because that's not what evangelists did in the late 1940s.

Evangelists preached the gospel and handed out tracts, but evangelists did not do social work. Bob Pierce dared to do what needed to be done in the circumstances that called for an existential leading of the Holy Spirit. Can you handle that bit of theology? He went ahead and did what he needed to do in that moment, and in so doing marched right off the map because it was unconventional and non-traditional.

World Vision again marched off the map when holistic development was added as a ministry. Up until then, we had been doing band-aid relief, which is important if a band-aid is called for and nothing else more is available. But it is not enough to do and will not satisfy the conscience and will not satisfy the call of God if we can contribute to the dignity, equality, self-determination and self-economic assurance of people. So we joined holistic development to relief and evangelism and again, as far as Christian organisations were concerned, marched off the map.

Later, when we created a true international partnership which transcended national and ecclesiastical and economic boundaries, we found ourselves out there where dragons and monsters are because, once again, that had not been tried. And so, because World Vision has kept marching off the map, daring to do the new and the different and not being intimidated because something was difficult or had never been done before, we frequently had to train our own topographers to chart unexplored areas.

I know the tendency is to build monuments. The tendency is to settle down. The tendency is to get very comfortable. I hope there is always that degree of impermanence about us – that degree of uncertainty, if you will – uncertainty about knowing for sure where we are going; that we never permanently camp anywhere on the road home.

As one perspective on the past, I would say don't ever lose the thrill of the quest. Don't ever lose the zest for adventure. Don't ever lose the pulse-quickening excitement of the chase.

There are a couple of principles that I want to leave with you – perspectives on the past and future. The first: draw bigger circles than anybody else you know of. Embrace everybody. We've been ecumenical from day one; we will continue to be ecumenical. It sometimes isn't easy to work with people

who claim it in name, and believe it in theory but don't practise it in reality. But, draw bigger circles than anybody.

Secondly, keep on giving yourself away.

Thirdly, be careful of alliances with governments. We fought this battle once; you'll have to keep fighting it probably on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis. Somebody immediately says, "Oh the governments are not our enemies." Well, let me tell you something else, they're also not your friend. Treat them as neutrals, that's the best thing to do.

Fourthly, find yourself some good managers, inspire them with leadership, and then get out of the way.

Next to last, create the best system and structure you can through which to manage, and then turn around and fight it, claw and fang. Because a bureaucracy unchecked can and will turn on and destroy its creators. If I had an epitaph at World Vision, I might want it to say, "He kept his finger in the dike against the onrushing tide of bureaucracy." For a while, I used to have a monkey-wrench of the month award. I kept a literal monkey-wrench on my desk and the person who could make the system function best in emergency situations, when the system was being challenged, was the person to whom I would give the monkey-wrench. Fight bureaucracy claw and fang.

And finally, attempt projects so big that they are bound to fail without God. Bob Pierce called it God-room. Call it whatever you will, but let those projects be so big that you can't possibly, humanly do them yourselves. God has to do them for you. It is then to his glory and not to ours or yours.

Well, that's marching off the map. It's risky. It's dangerous. Ted Egan, who ran our Seasweep Operation for a while, gave me a plaque that I cherish very much. The plaque reads: "A ship in a harbour is safe, but that's not what ships are for." So, World Vision, in its cocoon, in its insulation and isolation, if that's the path we chose, would be safe. But that's not what World Vision is for.

World Vision is for risk. In his book, *Ancient Evening*, which is about Egypt and the 10th century BC, Norman Mailer has one of the old pharaohs talking to his son, who is about to succeed him to the throne. The ancient monarch tells his son, "Look for the risk; we must obey it every time." There is no credit to be drawn from the virtue of one's past. Look for the risk. Make it your watchword. If you seek to save your life, corporate or

individual, I promise you – Jesus promises you – you will lose it. Don't play it safe.

March where the map-makers say the dangers are. And why do we go there? Why do we march off the map? Why do we go where dragons and monsters lurk? Is it because that's where danger is? No. Because that's where the adrenaline flows? No. Then why, why go there at all? Go for the risk because that's where God is. He is not in the sandbagged bunker. He is not in the protected cloister. He is not in some moated castle. He is beyond the horizon, over the next mountain, farther than the eye can see. He is way off the map, and that's where He calls us to join Him. Amen.

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RWANDA'S 100 DAYS OF SLAUGHTER

BEFORE the spring of 1994, Rwanda – a nation half the size of Tasmania – was primarily known in the Western world as the land of conservationist Diane Fossey and her work with silverback apes, popularised in the movie *Gorillas In The Mist*.

Then all hell broke loose.

In the year before the Rwandan genocide, which set tribe against tribe and neighbour against neighbour, the government had imported 500,000 new machetes from China.

These simple and efficient tools for a nation of small farmers were to prove most effective as weapons of mass destruction in 100 days of frenzied violence from April to mid-July 1994 which left more than 800,000 Rwandans dead.

It was one of the worst genocides since the Holocaust, prompting one missionary in the midst of the gruesome ethnic cleansing to say: "There are no devils left in hell; they are all in Rwanda."

Tensions had long simmered between Rwanda's Tutsi and Hutu tribes. The tensions exploded on the night of 6 April 1994 when a plane carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was shot down near the airport in Kigali, Rwanda's capital. It rapidly triggered a mass hysteria such as the world has rarely seen.

Thousands of ordinary Hutu people – shopkeepers, teachers and farmers – were encouraged or harassed into joining the killing of their Tutsi

neighbours. Entire families were hacked to death by members of their own communities.

Local Hutu officials incited ordinary citizens to kill their neighbours, and those who refused to kill were often murdered on the spot.

The United Nations estimated the death toll at 800,000 but other estimates claim up to two million may have been slaughtered. But even if the toll was 800,000, that's 8,000 a day, 333 every hour or six people every minute. Seventy-five percent of the Tutsi population were killed.

Women were systematically and brutally raped. The pervasive use of war rape against Tutsi women caused a spike in HIV infection, including babies born of rape to newly-infected mothers; many households were headed by orphaned children or widows.

When the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front gained control of the country, revenge attacks against Hutus began.

World Vision staff from Australia and elsewhere were among the first to cross Rwanda's borders in the days after the genocide started. The stories and images they captured provided some of the first concrete evidence of the horrific scale and nature of the genocide. But even then, the rest of the world was slow to react.

One World Vision worker recalled footage of the genocide being raced to a TV news channel in Melbourne direct from the source, only to be told people would either not be interested in it or be unable to watch it.

It was horrific. Unimaginable. Ian Curtis, a veteran national field director, made a wise decision to only send World Vision Australia staff who had previous experience of dead bodies and disasters.

"World Vision Australia really set the criteria of what was to be in Rwanda," he said. "We were deeply involved."

Lynn Arnold, then CEO of World Vision Australia, visited Rwanda in 1997.

"Rwanda was a harsh introduction to the world of development," he said.

"The country itself was three years from the genocide but still an unsafe place. The death toll was running at 1,000 a month. There were still many refugees who fled across to what was Zaire, now the Congo, and some of them were coming back.

"There were still tensions within the community and the issue of

reconciliation was just starting.

“There were many young children in the transit camps who had been separated from their families. They had little plastic bags around their necks because some were too young to remember their names. Whenever a child said something that might be significant, they would write it down and place it in the child’s bag, so hopefully these children could be reconnected with their families. It was one of the most moving experiences I had to be with some reunifications of children with their families.

“I did see some dreadful sights – once in a church where 3,000 people were massacred. The hymn books they were holding still lay among the rotting flesh and skeletons. And outside were masses of bones piled up. You would come across many mass grave sites.”

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THE LEGACY OF LITTLE ESPERANCE

The most powerful experience in Rwanda for Lynn Arnold came at a children’s centre where he met six-year-old Esperance.

She was the last member of her family alive. Her mother had died of AIDS not long before and Esperance – a name that ironically means hope – also had AIDS.

“Her skin was filled with pustules and she was lying on a bed when we met,” said Lynn. “I was sitting on her bed feeding her crushed bananas and she touched my heart. There was a fly on my arm and this little girl saw it and brushed it away. It moved me greatly.

“I couldn’t get her out of my mind and paid for a little rag doll for her. I was sent a photo of her in her little yellow dress and she was holding the doll. Just six weeks later she died.

“She so moved me that I would talk about her when I came back home. So my family felt they knew Esperance and she really became a member of our family. I have a photograph of her when I sat on the bed and in that photograph you can see the fly that she brushed away.

“It affirmed in me, in ways that perhaps non-Christians do not understand, that this only makes sense if there is a God. None of this makes sense if there isn’t a God.

“It would be such a despairing situation. But this much I know. God was going to welcome Esperance to his knee. Of that I have no doubt.”

Esperance also made a huge impact on cameraman and media advisor Steve Levitt, who was travelling with Lynn.

“This kid had more dignity, more respect, more kindness and more courage in her little body than you would find in any adult that you’d ever met. She had nothing. The kid was born with HIV and she had to go through the massacre and then had to die alone in her little bed. These things definitely bore a hole into your head.”

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A ROAD TO REDEMPTION

WHEN Australian John Steward came to Rwanda with his wife in 1997 to manage the reconciliation and peacebuilding program for World Vision, he found a nation suffering extreme shock, grief and guilt.

“They were tough days,” he recalled. “You had this cauldron of a million people who’d lived in exile for up to 30 years and two million recent refugees, all coming back to mix with the survivors and with perpetrators who hadn’t yet been identified.

“I saw a country moving at half pace, things taking so long to be done. People sitting around, people full of fear, people suspicious of other people, whispering against other people, ‘watch out for this person ... watch out for that person’. Just a complete absence of trust.”

John said the survivors had many questions. The first was generally, “Why didn’t I do something different to save my family?” The second common question was: “Why didn’t the rest of the world come to help us? Why did they go to Kosovo but didn’t come here? Why are we so devalued because we have black skins and we have no oil? Why?”

It would take a miracle for things to change. But John Steward realised that miracles start in small ways.

He recruited a small team of Rwandans and put all his energy into training them to deal with the emotional stress. World Vision became one of the first non-governmental organisations to actively engage in and respond to the psychosocial dimensions of national recovery.

After the genocide, Hutu and Tutsi Rwandans worked through their profound pain, anger, guilt and shame under the guidance of John Steward and others, often to a state of forgiveness and cooperation.

The experiment in recovery – in redemption – led to some remarkable stories.

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THE MIRACLE OF MAMA DEBORAH

THERE was a Hutu woman named Deborah praying in her house on her knees for safety. Her son was elsewhere in the house. Into this house came Tutsi soldiers who took her son away and murdered him.

One of John Steward's staff told him of a meeting at Mama Deborah's home where she told a group of people she felt the only way to get forgiveness from God was to forgive her neighbour.

She held out a drawing based on a dream she had and said, "Here is the house of my neighbour with the open door and here's the cross behind there and I have to go through my neighbour's house to get to the cross." And she said, "And then it hit me. Who is my neighbour? The enemy who killed my son." She didn't at that stage know the identity of the killer.

Soon after there was a knock at Deborah's door and several soldiers with guns entered. She was sure they had come to kill her.

The soldiers eventually left, but then one returned.

He told her: "I'm the one who killed your son. The night we came for him you were kneeling in prayer and I know you were praying for me. I'm an orphan and my parents were killed in the genocide and I thought I'd get peace by seeking revenge.

"I haven't found peace. I haven't been able to sleep any night since I killed your son. And every time I close my eyes all I can see is you kneeling in prayer. You have every right to hand me over to the authorities and I could not complain about that."

When he left, Deborah was confused. A few days later she went to the military camp and asked for the soldier. She didn't even know his name.

But he was found and the soldier and Deborah sat and talked about forgiveness. "She'd had the dream again the night before she visited him so

she knew he was the one she had to forgive," said John Steward.

Deborah said, "You took my only son. You will become my son. I will cook for you. I will wash your clothes. You will be my son."

Her "act of revenge" was to ask the young man to fill the gap and become her son.

Deborah now works as a voluntary counsellor and runs seminars on reconciliation. She is passionate about the power of forgiveness.

"The people who heal and forgive get an inner power that is just amazing," said John Steward. "It's like the authority that you don't claim for yourself is given to you for your truth and honesty. Mama Deborah has spoken to thousands."

Another survivor who heard Deborah's story went to the prison to seek the release of the youth who killed her five children. She adopted him into her family and now he has married.

There's a second part to the Mama Deborah story.

Augustine, a World Vision area manager, married a Tutsi woman whose husband had been killed in the genocide. His wife Claudine hadn't dealt with the pain and, living in a Hutu-dominated area, feared she would be killed.

Augustine knew the story of Mama Deborah. He brought her into his home and said to his wife: "This Hutu woman won't hurt you."

"They became the best of friends," said John Steward.

"Very soon the trust developed to the point where, when Claudine became pregnant with twins, Deborah said she would look after the other children.

"Deborah and Claudine would walk down the streets hand in hand and people would say 'this is impossible'.

"Imagine the power of that example."

On one of his many return visits to Rwanda, John Steward took a photo of the two women.

"I was staggered because there is a physical stereotype of a Hutu and physical stereotype of a Tutsi. When I printed off the photo, Claudine the Tutsi looked like the physical stereotype of a Hutu and Deborah looked like a Tutsi.

"It's almost like they had been able to rehumanise the categories."

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MESSAGES FROM ABOVE

GOD spoke clearly to David Jenkin in Guatemala.

At the time, David had been chairman of the World Vision Australia board and was about to become chairman of World Vision International.

“I was so busy and there were so many interruptions all the time,” he said “Even at 5.30 in morning there would be a knock on the door with someone wanting to see me. I had never felt more tired.

“I needed some time out and I went for a walk.”

David was drawn to the Catholic cathedral that stood white and beautiful in the sunshine “because I felt God had something to say to me”.

“I needed time to sit quietly and think,” he said. “I walked to the cathedral and in the door and heard someone crying but no-one was to be seen.

“Gingerly, I went down the main aisle to the front and could hear the crying getting stronger. As I came to the front I saw a lady prostrate with her head under the cross and she was bawling her eyes out.

“That had a huge impact on me. I realised I had to identify more with the poor.

“And until that day I did not have a balanced opinion of Roman Catholic worship. That gave it to me in such a powerful way. This woman was bawling her eyes out unashamedly and God said very clearly to me, ‘There’s something wrong with you. You have to get some balance in this.’

“It was an unbelievable moment for me.”

David Jenkin is a sharp, pragmatic businessman with a huge compassion for his fellow human beings.

He had been CEO of The Myer Emporium Ltd in his early 40s, and had spearheaded a range of important projects, including the massive $1 billion city-centre redevelopment at Melbourne Central.

He has travelled to more than 60 countries both as a businessman and as the first non-American to chair World Vision International (for whom he led a global strategic re-organisation in the 1990s).

David was at first reluctant to become chairman of World Vision International.

“I was extremely busy at the time,” he said. “Roberta Hestenes, the then current chair, rang and asked me if I would be the next chairman. Instantly I said no because being chairman of the Australian board and being on the board of World Vision International was as much as I imagined I could cope with.”

Roberta told David that God had told her he was the person to become chairman.

David said the answer was still no but that he’d leave the door open slightly.

Within a week Graeme Irvine, by then president of World Vision International, had rung and said he’d been praying and was also convinced that David should be the next chairman.

Then a friend from David’s home church prayed with him and said, “Somebody will have a word for you.”

“The moment I heard that, there was a thump in my chest and I thought ‘Isaiah 61’. I was unusually confident there was not an Isaiah 61. I should have realised there was. I went to my Bible and Isaiah 61 and across the top of the chapter I’d written – I don’t know when – ‘this is my World Vision leadership chapter’. I knew then that I had to accept the chairmanship.”

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A FOOTBALL LEGEND MAKES HIS MARK

LONG after his retirement, prolific goal kicker and spectacular high marker Gary Ablett Snr is still rated as one of the greatest AFL players in the game’s history.

In 1995, when Gary was still the number one goal kicker in the league, he travelled to Africa with World Vision’s national operations manager Ray Walker, another football legend who had played 72 games with Footscray in the 1960s.

Gary’s introduction to the African people was somewhat alarming.

“At the time, Gary had a little goatee beard and would tie his hair up at the back,” said Ray Walker.

“He looked like the wild man of Borneo and he generally carried a video camera slung over his shoulder. At our first stop in Malawi, we took Gary into a classroom where the kids sat on the floor because there were no

tables or chairs. When he appeared all the kids jumped up, dived out the open windows and ran into the fields. They thought Gary's video camera was a gun or a rocket launcher.

"After a while everything calmed down and the kids came back but Gary was pretty shaken by the incident."

The champion footballer said he was saddened that real guns that looked a bit like a camera had obviously previously been taken into classrooms and children had been terrorised.

Gary was later to meet up with his 13-year-old sponsored child Kutsala. World Vision sponsorship had provided schoolbooks and uniforms for the girl and had enabled the family to have clean water from a nearby well.

During the African visit, Gary and Ray came across a young woman lying prostrate on the ground muttering to herself.

"There was a lot of witchcraft in the area and the woman's uncle, the local witchdoctor, had placed a spell on her," said Ray. "Gary said we should pray over her. So we did and within minutes we saw this calmness come over her face and she started talking normally. She was released. The uncle and his followers took off when they saw this.

"I'd never seen that sort of thing before. It was amazing and quite extraordinary."

Ray said the trip with Gary Ablett was "a most humbling experience".

"In spite of the poverty, the African people who were so desperately poor displayed a real warmth, friendliness and godliness. Their Christian faith is far more openly expressed than what I have ever witnessed in Australia.

"The respect they have for the support provided by World Vision is freely acknowledged. When you are challenged, as we all are from time to time, as to whether the money gets through, then seeing the way World Vision provides so many essentials that we take for granted, makes it all worthwhile.

"I found this a most humbling experience. It made me realise the enormous responsibility we have to help provide a better world for our brothers and sisters living in such difficult times."

THE LOTTERY OF LIFE

SIMON McKeon's earliest memories are of his much-loved older sister Diane, who was born intellectually disabled.

"I was told at a very young age that she actually should have been like me but was stuck in the birth canal for a few too many minutes," he said.

"When you understand what that means, when you are told that at the age of five, you suddenly realise she was going to lead a very different life to me. A few minutes means a difference for the rest of her life.

"Unless you're really callous you have to ask the question – why? You don't take anything for granted."

That early challenge was to mould Simon's life. He was to become a passionate charity crusader – a director on the World Vision Australia board from 1994 to 2005 – chairman of the Macquarie Group, AMP and the CSIRO, a world record-breaking yachtsman and Australian of the Year in 2011.

Travelling to the field with World Vision again brought into sharp focus the lottery of life.

"In Ethiopia, I met a fellow exactly my age who'd spent 25 years in the military service and then went back to his village, married and had a couple of children," he said.

"He was probably in his early 50s when I saw him. He had a little plot of land and was working with World Vision assiduously to get the best out of it. He was, in a sense, not in a good place because he did not have that many years left to work productively and even though he looked pretty good to me, I knew he was struggling.

"I asked what worried him. He said, 'I worry that I have a young family and I have to do what I can now in these few short years because there is no superannuation.'

"It really struck me. I've been to all sorts of dramatic places that have been in the headlines but this was different. It was an ordinary situation that affected me greatly.

"I thought, 'We are the same age but our lives are so different because of where we were born.'"

Simon grew up in a working class suburb in Melbourne "where there was a

lot of need". His parents were involved in helping others in the community. "I never wanted to let go of what my parents did to help others," he said.

He was in his early 30s when approached to join the World Vision board by then chairman David Jenkin.

"I don't really know why I was approached," he said. "I think I stumbled into the 40 Hour Famine the second year it got going. I was part of a youth group and it was quite captivating for a young bunch of university students. But there wasn't really any full engagement.

"It was not until I joined the board that I came to understand how it works."

Simon believes company directors should volunteer their time to boards of charities they are passionate about. He thinks it is simply good business.

"The successful businesses will be those that don't focus solely on making profits, but are willing to get involved in the heavy lifting of tough societal problems," he said.

Simon served on the board of World Vision's VisionFund from 2004 to 2012, which has the responsibility for World Vision's micro economic development activities. Formed in 2003, VisionFund provides low interest micro loans to people in developing nations to be able to accumulate assets and build up their small businesses one step at a time.

"Over the decades, World Vision had ended up with a large micro finance business but it was like spaghetti," he said. "Everyone around the world had thrown a little bit of money at micro financing but there was no structure," said Simon.

"In the late nineties, a group of us got together and said it was time to work it out. A few of us went on the board of VisionFund, which was one of those wonderful little success stories.

"It wasn't central to what World Vision was doing but we knew what we were presiding over was quite large."

Simon's experience with micro financing made him aware of the challenges World Vision faced in different parts of the world.

"I subscribe to the theory that there are some places that are just harder to help and progress than others. Much of Asia has a commercial culture to it and doesn't need much. You get rid of a few nasty regimes or whatever it is and leave them to their own devices and they are naturally very creative and hardworking, so things start to work.

“For me, the main challenge is that there are other parts of the world where that doesn’t happen so easily.

“Looking through the lens of VisionFund we got reports and our loan book performance in Africa was always harder than anywhere else. There were many reasons for that but at the end of the day I put it down to there being a bit of a cultural issue. There were many reasons why people in Africa took the loan that they knew had to be repaid and the loan didn’t get repaid.

“All I know is that you can put in the same resources to help and the impact isn’t the same in all countries. It’s not a one size fits all solution. That’s a good thing to know.

“We probably attempted to say too often ‘well it’s their fault’ and that’s not right. It’s just different. You can’t tell me that their aspiration is to do it tough, to starve and have higher death rates. No, it’s just different and it’s incredibly complex.

“The first thing to get knocked into us pretty early on in VisionFund was that just because something works somewhere it doesn’t mean it will work elsewhere. There’s huge diversity.

“What I have always enjoyed about the whole World Vision experience is that when the organisation identifies a place to focus on, the process for the first year is just to go into the place and talk and listen.

“Perhaps it’s not always perfect but the idea of the community responding with what they think they need and how we think we can respond is absolutely vital.”

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SMALL LOANS WITH GIANT IMPACT

THE enormously wealthy Howard Hughes was once asked how much money it would take to make him happy.

He reportedly replied: “Just a little more.”

Hughes once became fond of banana-nut ice-cream, and his aides sought to secure a bulk shipment for him, only to discover that the manufacturer had discontinued the flavour.

The ice-cream company agreed to make a special order for Hughes, 350 gallons, and shipped it to him. A few days after the order arrived, Hughes

announced he was tired of banana-nut and now wanted only vanilla ice-cream.

That's the heart of discontent. No matter what he had, it was never enough.

Contrast the perpetual discontent of Howard Hughes with the joy and hope of VisionFund's borrowers who have used loans to start building a life out of poverty for children, families and communities.

One VisionFund success story is Genevieve, a primary school teacher in the Philippines.

She was 11 when her mother Davina told her she would not be able to attend school any more. Her father Narciso had just been forced to give up dive fishing for a living because he was getting headaches. He started to sail boats for others who fished but it was hard to make enough money to keep his family fed or keep their home secure from the tropical weather.

"Mum said there wasn't enough money to continue my education," said Genevieve. "I hid my tears because I didn't want her to feel worse than she already did."

Davina took control of the situation by getting a $70 loan from VisionFund and used the money to buy sea cucumbers from a local fisherman. Davina would wake at 5am to collect the sea cucumbers, clean and dry them out. She then sold them to an exporter to China, where they are a delicacy.

Davina and Narciso repaid their loan and took out a further two loans from VisionFund. Their business has become a success. The family have built a second floor that covers their original home and all of Genevieve's brothers and sisters are at school.

Another VisionFund success is Moses, abandoned as a baby in Rwanda and seemingly destined for a life of poverty.

Moses' aunt Judith had raised him since birth. She was devastated when Moses left school at the age of 14.

"I sat back and looked at the situation around me. I thought, 'What if I grow some crops to sell at the market?'"

Judith began planting eggplant in two small beds and sold them at the market for a few months. During this time she learned about VisionFund and applied for a loan.

"They could see I was an honest woman with a modest business, so they

were happy to lend me money," she said.

Judith stopped producing eggplants and began buying clothes to sell. As she gained more customers, she constructed a little market stand where she now sells clothes, shoes, handbags and household linen.

Judith's income grew and she convinced Moses to stop working at the tea plantation and return to school. With the money she earned from her stall, Judith paid for Moses' school fees, clothes and books.

Judith is proud that she has given Moses the opportunity to live the life he chooses. Now she is working hard to fulfill her own dream.

"I want to construct a shop with a roof, so I can continue working when it rains. That's my prayer, that's my wish," said Judith.

VisionFund's average loan is around $600 and most of the borrowers are women.

As U2 singer Bono said: "Give a man a fish, and he'll eat for a day. Give a woman microcredit, and she, her husband, her children, and her extended family will eat for a lifetime."

VisionFund borrowers are carefully assessed and support each other in groups, sharing business and financial knowledge. As profits are made and loans are paid back, the loan is recycled for a new borrower to get their business idea up and running. Every $1,000 loan creates, on average, nine jobs, so whole communities benefit from local economic growth.

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WHEN $30 CAN CHANGE A LIFE

BEATRICE was a single mother with HIV living in a small house in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, with eight children.

Five of the children were her own and three were orphans that she had taken into her care. She had no access to water or electricity in her home and she cooked on a simple wood-fired stove.

She received a loan of $30 through World Vision Australia, which changed her life.

In the past, she could only buy and resell 20 litres of milk each day. But now, with the loan she is able to buy and sell 40 litres a day and still have some milk left for her own children.

“It has doubled my small income and improved the health of my children,” she said.

“I hope to build my business in the future.”

Beatrice belongs to a World Vision group with 108 women and 38 men who are living with HIV and AIDS.

“The group has been a great support to me and I’ve seen the group play an important role in changing the community’s understanding of HIV and AIDS,” she said. “In the past, many people thought you could be infected by eating or shaking hands with people who are HIV positive.

“I am very thankful for this partnership we have with Australia.”

With funding from Australia, World Vision Rwanda has formed HIV and AIDS groups that provide training in traditional craft skills such as making handwoven baskets, education about improved nutrition and HIV and AIDS, small loans to help develop businesses, training in effective agricultural practices, direct food support, care for people dying of AIDS, a medical insurance scheme that allows access to health centres, and social support and encouragement.

Mary Mutasi is another young Rwandan whose life has changed because of funding from World Vision Australia.

The 17-year-old has no parents. She lives in northern Rwanda with her two sisters, aged 15 and 21.

Mary’s family owned two small plots of land, but both houses were destroyed during the fighting in 1994. Now, Mary and her sisters work on the land to grow food. They live in a small house that the community helped them to build.

“I would like to furnish our house and make enough money so we can pay the school fees for my younger sister to finish secondary school,” said Mary. “This seems a little too much at this stage, but this is my hope for the future.”

Although she has only finished some primary schooling, Mary has spent the past two years in vocational training learning to be a tailor. Along with 27 other orphan girls, the classes begin at 7.45am and finish at 5.30pm – some of the girls walk up to two hours to get there.

With funding from World Vision Australia, over 2,000 Rwandan orphans like Mary have received training to help them earn incomes for their families.

The children also get to meet with other orphans and receive support and encouragement.

Mary and the other girls in the group work 10 to 12 days per month as tailors – often making uniforms for the local school children. The rest of their days are spent working their land to provide enough food for their families.

The girls work together at a building provided by World Vision and share a bank account that allows them to purchase materials, buttons and thread and maintain their treadle-powered machines.

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SUDAN AT THE BRINK

A COMBINATION of war, factional fighting between various rebel groups and bad weather led to massive population displacements and thousands of starving children in Sudan in 1998.

Hunger, disease and war were taking the lives of three out of every 10 children before they reached the age of five. In southern Sudan, in particular, decades of underdevelopment, compounded by armed conflict, had disrupted farming, herding and other traditional means of surviving a hot and inhospitable climate.

In some areas, emaciated women and children were stripping leaves from the trees and boiling them to eat. They had nothing else. An entire region was dying.

World Vision was the first organisation to publicly warn of a “great human tragedy” looming in southern Sudan in 1998.

The organisation mounted a massive aid operation in response to the emergency and faced enormous logistical difficulties. Most roads were rutted dirt tracks, impassable in the rainy season. When roads were blocked by weather, or by fighting, tonnes of food were air-dropped into remote areas.

World Vision distributed survival kits containing two blankets, two cooking pots, one piece of cloth, two mosquito nets, needle and thread, two aluminium cups, two aluminium plates, two bags of salt, four bars of soap, one plastic sheet, two packets of razor blades and one large plastic container.

World Vision emergency support officer Keith Lancaster and Mike Paterson, World Vision state manager for Western Australia, were distributing food every day that weather and roads permitted.

“One day we heard about a town called Tonj, which had been occupied by the government of Sudan and then liberated by rebels and we heard things were pretty bad there,” said Keith. “They needed our help.

“We did a 70k trip down there, which took a few hours in two four-wheel drive vehicles. On the way we saw a lot of destruction – tanks and trucks in ruins and what was left of a school. There were hundreds of starving people out in the streets.

“There was a lady sitting on a roofless concrete veranda with a tarpaulin next to her. Under the tarp was her three-year-old daughter who had died. No-one had the energy to bury her so the woman was just sitting there grieving with her dead child next to her. She was just one of dozens we saw in the same situation.

“We continued down every street, every alley and saw really bad stuff. When the government soldiers had pulled out of Tonj, they threw bodies down wells so there was no clean drinking water.

“There was one kid, a little boy, also in a very bad way. He had a little cloth over his head because he didn’t have the energy to chase the flies away. And he was struggling to breathe. People couldn’t do anything for him because there was no food there. We had a little bit of sugar with us and we gave him the sugar in a little bit of water hoping that would keep him going until we could get back the next day.

“We headed back to our compound, got stuff ready and headed back first thing the next day and had this massive food distribution. The little boy had died overnight. But we were in time to save a lot of other people.

“Next to our compound was an intensive feeding centre, mostly for young kids, who’d come in severely malnourished, and some older folk. It was around-the-clock feeding. We were mixing up this food in what had been big fuel drums and people were being fed around the clock.

“One night there was a lady who had finished her long trek to get to the feeding care centre and she had a bundle around her shoulders and it turned out to be a little kid very much like the boy who had just died. Again, this kid was malnourished and struggling to breathe. I didn’t think he was

going to survive but he was admitted to the care centre.

“I came back in a week’s time and one of the nurses said, ‘See that group of kids over there?’ - pointing to a group of kids who were running around and looking healthy. She pointed to one and said, ‘He’s the boy who came in last week.’ Just one week of intensive feeding and he was ok. It lifts your spirits.”

Children in South Sudan are still in the midst of a crisis. More than a million people have been driven from their homes since intense conflict began in South Sudan in December 2013. Today, children and families still live in fear of violence and are unable to return home. Even more – four million – face alarming food insecurity and are in need of humanitarian aid.

World Vision is committed to helping displaced children in South Sudan, and has increased its work in the area in response to the current crisis.

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THE EX-PREMIER BECOMES CEO

GOD opens doors in the most interesting and unusual ways, says Lynn Arnold.

Those opened doors have led Lynn on an extraordinary life journey from his early years as a Quaker, to Premier of South Australia, CEO of World Vision, head of Anglicare and, more recently, an ordained Anglican minister.

The big changes have been very much God’s callings in his life.

After leaving politics after 15 years in the South Australian Parliament, Lynn and his family moved to Spain for two years. On his return to Adelaide in 1996, he was approached in church by his friend Rex Keily – then a World Vision board member – who told him the organisation was looking for a new CEO.

“You should put your hat in the ring,” Rex told him.

“My immediate reaction was not very positive,” said Lynn. “I knew it would mean a move to Melbourne and we had just moved back to Adelaide, I had a good job with a Spanish company and I was very happy. So why would I do that?

“My wife said, ‘Just read the paperwork,’ so I read the paperwork and, even though we’d been World Vision sponsors since the seventies, I hadn’t

understood until then what a profoundly Christian organisation it was. My wife said, 'Why not throw your hat in the ring and see what God wants? You can always say no.'

"So I threw my hat in the ring and went through the process and was offered the job. I said, 'I need a week to think about this,' and went back to consult my family.

"I said to the kids, 'I've got this opportunity. It'll mean a pay cut and we'd have to move to Melbourne and you'll have to leave your friends.' Two of them said 'yep let's go', two said 'let's not'. And, as in any political survey, one said 'don't know'. So I said to the two noes, 'You have a week to think about it and if either of you still says no, we won't go.'

"At the end of the week our oldest son – the first of the noes – said, 'Dad this job was made for you.' Our eldest daughter, the other no, agreed.

"That was the start of the World Vision journey."

"The organisation had a degree of uncertainty about me because they probably thought, 'What experience does this guy have about development?' They weren't to know that at the age of 17 I had spent three weeks in Indonesia as part of the Young Asian Leaders seminar organised by Quakers entirely on the theme of development in the Third World. I was one of five Australians who went over there. And it was an eye-opening experience for me. It was a long time earlier but it had left in me a long-time interest in development.

"I'd been a premier and a minister but that's not the same as being CEO. And I said, 'The best I can offer you is this. I'm committed to what the organisation wants; I feel God is calling me here. I'm going to ask lots of dumb questions and, among the dumb questions, I might ask questions that are helpful.'

"I didn't follow the presidential style of the first 100 days of change. I spent the first three months listening. That gave me an idea of what the pulse of the organisation was. And then we started the process of strategic planning.

"I was asked years later if World Vision met my expectations and I said it met my expectations in ways I didn't expect. I expected to come into an ecumenical environment. What I didn't expect was the vibrancy of that ecumenism. That you could be with Baptists and Anglicans and Catholics

and Pentecostals and Orthodox and Copts and we would be sharing our different faith experiences from all our backgrounds. It was such a joyous situation.

“The second thing was that I expected to come into a Christian home and I came into a Christian journey.

“My Christian pilgrimage deepened profoundly in the 11 and a half years I was with World Vision. I learnt so much and met some amazing people that challenged my faith.”

Lynn Arnold was CEO of World Vision Australia from 1997 until 2003. In 2003 he was appointed regional vice president of World Vision International for the Asia Pacific Region based in Bangkok, Thailand. In October 2006 he was appointed senior director (board development and peer review) for World Vision International, heading a team assisting World Vision boards and advisory councils in the development of their governance capacity and also for administering peer review programs in the World Vision partnership.

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WATERING THE WEEDS

LYNN Arnold was horrified when field worker Roger Walker told him of talking to a church leader in Myanmar about World Vision’s efforts to save local street kids from the ravages of the violent and broken communities in which they lived.

The church leader, seemingly oblivious to all the gospel references of Jesus rebuking his disciples for chasing away children, responded with perplexity: “But why would you water weeds?”

“Here was a church leader, a person of faith, a pious person, faithful to God, asking the question why weeds, namely street children, would be watered,” said Lynn.

“When I heard this, I felt the breath had been knocked out of me.”

Still reeling, Lynn Arnold flew from Myanmar to Bangladesh where he met Mildred, a Bangladeshi by birth if not by name, who worked in the slums of Dhaka.

The slums of this city of seven million people are a dangerous place that even the local police fear to enter due to the high rate of violence.

“But for her part, Mildred entered these slums every day to run a community centre from where she operated a number of programs, the most significant of which was the one working with street children,” said Lynn.

“Each morning, street children would come to her centre and there would be buckets of water for them to wash, food for them to eat and then she would provide time and space for them to be kids.

“At the end of the day they would have to leave and I asked what would happen to them during the night.

“She said, ‘I can’t look after them at night. I don’t have enough money or space. They have to go back on the street and their job is to survive until the next morning.’

“Mildred said survival for the street children would often involve things that would shock me. There was every likelihood that they would steal and the possibility that they would be involved in violence, not just in immediate self-defence, but as part of surviving in a brutal environment.

“But then she said, ‘I tell you, whatever they have done I will be here the next morning with water to wash with.’

“Here was the non-judgmental woman saying that if these children made it through the night to the next morning, she would still be here for them – with buckets of water for them to wash.

“She had no problem watering these weeds; for her they were children precious to Jesus and therefore they were precious to her.”

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FROM STREET KIDS TO MENTORS

THE street children of Cambodia are some of the most vulnerable in the world. Many beg on the streets from morning to night. Others are the “rag pickers” who make a living by rummaging through refuse in the streets to collect material for salvage. Some children steal. It’s all about survival from one day to the next.

World Vision Australia communications advisor Gabrielle Brophy visited a street outreach project in the capital, Phnom Penh, that had been set up to help children working as rag pickers.

It wasn't run by teachers or social workers. Instead, the program was being run by former street kids, and now volunteers, Devi, then 13, and Veht, then 14.

Through World Vision's rehabilitation programs, they had steered their lives toward a more hopeful future. They were now peer educators.

The boys set up tarpaulins and lanterns on the footpaths so street kids across the city could come to learn about issues such as nutrition, hygiene, domestic violence, and ways to protect themselves from exploitation.

At the centre, they were also able to play and have the chance to be carefree children, even if only for an hour or two at a time.

"It was inspiring to see the children completely engaged by Veht's use of a cartoon flipbook and posters," said Gabrielle.

"While Veht eagerly taught the children, Devi set up a first aid kit and went about checking if any of them had wounds or open sores that needed cleaning and covering to prevent infection. The cuts are the occupational hazard of a working life spent picking up bottles or scrap from under piles of rubbish, and testify to the difficulties faced by Cambodia's street children.

"I watched in awe as Devi diligently attended to their open cuts and grazes by dim lantern light. He was a child forced into adulthood by poverty, now working to soften the blow for others. It is a powerful image that will stay with me; a glimpse of the hope that lives in the human spirit – even in a child who has lived a tougher life than any child should have to, and now gives back because he has been given a chance."

Thousands of children on the streets of Phnom Penh are still at serious risk because of the conditions in which they live and work. Their basic needs are usually not met.

They become vulnerable to exploitation and other harm. World Vision is committed to making a difference for these children, especially the youngest, by providing children with information that will help them to protect themselves.

World Vision also offers shelter and access to education. But the main objective is to assist these children to return to their families, or find other nurturing living situations off the dangerous streets.

RETIRED Barossa Valley wheat farmers Jill and Ken Fyfe took 10 members of their family, including children and grandchildren, when they went to

Kenya to visit their three sponsored children. It was a life-changing experience for the family.

“Our whole family and the grandkids were overwhelmed with the visit,” said Jill. “It was an amazing time for all of us.”

The family had collected 12 cases of goods from family and friends before they left home to distribute to the children and schools where their sponsored children lived.

“We had clothing, sporting equipment, school supplies and first aid kits. So with very loaded vehicles, we set off once we arrived in Kenya,” said Jill.

Their first visit was to meet Peter, a child sponsored by Jill and Ken and their children, Jo and Darren. Peter attends a school with 890 pupils. “As we drove up, we were amazed by the hundreds of children running, yelling and screaming at us, all with very smiley faces,” said Jill.

“Music was being made by children hitting plastic buckets with sticks.”

The Fyfe family met Peter’s teachers, his parents and siblings before the children put on a special performance of singing and dancing.

Then the family drove a few kilometres to meet Hannah, who is the sponsored child of Jill and Ken’s elder daughter, Elizabeth, and her family. Again they were greeted by a noisy welcome by the 1,200 students at Hannah’s school.

Then they went to another school to meet 13-year-old Lucy, who they had met two years earlier.

“There were 1,500 people at the school and all the women were walking backwards in front of our vehicle and singing. Lucy was with them with her mum, dad and sisters. It was so wonderful to see them,” said Jill.

“Lucy stayed next to us then, holding on, until she joined her classmates to sing and dance for us. There is something very special about the rhythm of Kenyan music which makes everyone want to dance.

“Ken and I were each given a costume to wear and we headed up to the new classrooms. The school had placed a plaque on the outside wall and we were asked to cut the ribbon to open the new rooms.

“I write to Lucy every month or so and she replies to us – now that she knows us her letters are so chatty. She tells us what her family are doing, if the crops are progressing well, what she plans to do when she leaves

school.

“The relationship our family has with our sponsored children is very special, made even closer now that we have been able to visit them in person. It was wonderful to share this experience with all 12 members of our family.”

Upon their return, the family donated to specific projects within Lucy’s community and later donated to World Vision’s work in Kenya.

“Lucy is part of our family. She lives on a market garden on a hill with amazing views. The house is like a farm shed. We built more rooms, put water tanks in and gave them a toilet. Simple things that can make such a difference to their lives.”

Jill first visited Kenya more than 20 years ago. “It got into my soul,” she said.

“When I came home I thought how lucky we were to live in Australia. I had two girls and thought it would be great to involve them in World Vision’s work. Our girls each now have a sponsor child.

“To be honest, we get more out of it than we give. The tiny bit we give helps a few. It also makes our life so much better.

“In Australia, we worry about whether the pillow cases match the sheets. Over there they are lucky to even have a sheet. I think it’s wonderful that our grandchildren know what life is like in other parts of the world and grow up learning to care for others.”

The Fyfes are looking forward to visiting Kenya again to see their sponsored children.

THE 2000s

Wikipedia and Twitter were launched, George W. Bush became US President, attacks on the New York Twin Towers shocked the world, Iraq was invaded, Africa’s population reached one billion, the summer Olympics were held in Sydney, Kevin Rudd became Prime Minister, Australia survived the Global Financial Crisis, 202 people were killed in the Bali bombings and the Asian tsunami devastated many nations. World Vision responded immediately with life-saving aid. Disaster relief included long-term development and rebuilding work. World Vision became more active in working with governments and businesses on issues such as child labour and children in armed conflicts.

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A TRANSFORMING MOMENT

IN January 2003, Lynn Arnold was joyfully holding a newly-born babe – his first grandson – in his arms. He felt "over the moon".

Five days later, he went on his first trip to Cambodia as CEO of World Vision Australia and was surprised by the emotions that welled up within him.

"I'd been to the field many times in my journey with World Vision and seen many things that were distressing. People asked me how I coped and I'd say, 'Wherever I've been I've seen joys and I've seen burdens. I've always seen something joyful even in the most desperate of situations.'

"But this trip was somehow very different."

In Cambodia, Lynn visited a high school that became an interrogation centre, torture chamber and cemetery during Pol Pot's five-year reign. The schoolrooms had been divided up into cells where prisoners in chains waited to be interrogated. Most of them died. There were photographs on the walls of inmates of all ages – including young children and old people.

A school built for learning had become a place for dying. It's a testament to the great suffering of children in Cambodia.

Lynn then travelled with World Vision staff to National Highway 5, where he was introduced to households headed by children whose parents had died of AIDS.

"These households were surviving on World Vision help. At one there was a child, only 18 months old, who had a death rattle cough. You knew this kid could not survive."

The next morning the World Vision CEO went to the notorious Stung Meanchey rubbish tip, home and workplace to 1,500-plus children. Knee deep in trash, Phnom Penh's poorest families struggled at the stinking tip to build a life from what others threw away. They were scavengers, living amid the disease caused by ever-increasing mountains of garbage.

World Vision worked there because there were four villages of people who lived on this rubbish dump. Many had come from the rural areas because there was no longer a life for them there.

Garbage trucks ploughed in and out of the 100-acre tip. When they lifted

and tilted their basins, it rained trash. People swarmed underneath, bags open, competing for the best bits of refuse and recyclables.

Children were frequently run down by trucks delivering rubbish to the tip.

“There were these kids working from dawn to late at night scratching out a living. It was a Dante-esque environment. Then they took me to street sanctuaries where World Vision was giving the kids sanctuary from the sex trade.

“I was with Steve Levitt, a cameraman working for World Vision. He’d been there at this World Vision sanctuary two months before and met two teenage girls who were ill with AIDS and asked after them. They had both died.

“And Steve, the really strong field worker guy, said, ‘We couldn’t save their lives. All we could do was hold their hands as they walked into the dark.’

“It was a shattering experience for me because I had been emotionally 30,000 feet up with the birth of my grandchild and here I saw child after child after child suffering and wondered: doesn’t God love them too? Don’t their parents love them? Don’t their grandparents love them?

“Inside I was gutted so much that I thought I would need post-traumatic counselling. The joys and burdens argument was not working for me anymore.

“The transforming moment for me came when I remembered Bob Pierce’s prayer –‘Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God.’

“I felt an overwhelming power of God saying, ‘Lynn you have become too comfortable, you think you’re doing good things, and in the world’s view doubtless you are, but you’re too comfortable. I’m going to have to break your heart because you’ve lost something.’

“So He broke my heart. Then I realised it was time for me to go to a new field. It confirmed that it was time to leave as CEO of World Vision.”

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THE ONES HE CAN’T FORGET

THE memory of the two girls dying of AIDS met by Steve Levitt in Cambodia is still stark.

“They keep coming back like dull electric shocks to my heart. I keep playing

it over and over again," said Steve, a newshound/cameraman who has covered countless wars and crises in the hardest places in the world.

"On a hot Cambodian day we took them to lunch at a restaurant, the Pla Mock, where they looked like skeletons with makeup and scared the waiters. They were young girls who had been trafficked into sexual slavery, then rescued by World Vision Australia, but not before they contracted HIV/AIDS and it set fire to their just pubescent bodies.

"The absolute blind injustice of their lives enrages me even today. I can't talk about it without choking. Like all young teenage girls they were very conscious of their appearance and the glancing looks of fear and disgust from other diners.

"HIV/AIDS was raging and misunderstood. Cambodia was all death and witchcraft after the war. Like Africa, the rumour came about that you could rid yourself of AIDS by sleeping with young girls and in Cambodia that meant really young."

Steve was in Cambodia with taekwondo champion, Olympic Gold medalist and World Vision ambassador Lauren Burns, the daughter of 60s rock star Ronnie Burns.

"She is petite with a dancer's body and head-turning good looks," said Steve. "She was in the pinnacle of health and beauty with an open heart and a radiating positive smile. She was one possible picture of the beautiful future these girls would never have. They checked out her clothes and earrings and asked girl questions such as, 'Do you have a boyfriend?' I hung back a bit not wanting to muddy the feminine flow and, in part, ashamed to be a male. And then the lunch was over and they went off to the hospice to die.

"In these girls you could see the battle of evil and grace all wrapped up in their short-lived narratives. Not unique, not unusual for the time, almost banal in its ordinariness in the Cambodian context, but stand back for a micro second and it's a monstrous indictment on so many. Mostly because it is still going on.

"Had these girls lived, they would have to be watching out for their daughters. Batting for evil were those that did the deed, those that profited and those who did nothing to stamp it out and on the side of grace those that held their skeleton hands as they stepped into the dark with no family member by them and just a memory of hell as a life.

“For them, death must have been like shutting tight a door on an intensely frightened child and turning out the lights. A push into the dark where there is no escape from the nightmare.”

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ON THE THRESHOLD OF CHANGE

AFTER Lynn Arnold resigned in June 2003 to take up a new role with the organisation as vice-president for the Asia-Pacific region, the search began for a new CEO of World Vision Australia. More than 100 people applied for the position, which was advertised internationally and locally.

The standout choice was Tim Costello, who had not applied for the job but had been leading devotions for World Vision staff. Several staff members asked for Tim to be considered as a candidate to lead the organisation.

“Tim was a great choice,” said former board chairman David Jenkin. “The staff wanted Tim and approached the board. Tim’s appointment was unanimous at the end.”

“There were several candidates who were interviewed,” said then board chairman Peter King.

“There was a very positive reaction from the staff when we announced Tim’s appointment. He had been involved in philanthropic organisations not dissimilar to World Vision but not as big. He was involved in social issues and was very well known at the time and much admired.

“He had a tremendous high profile, a tremendous innate authority and was a man of passion and great ability. We believed we were on the threshold of tremendous forward movement.

“I’d met Tim but knew his brother Peter better at the time. I remember sitting in a restaurant and asking Tim to come on board.”

Tim, brother of then federal Treasurer Peter Costello, had been a lawyer, senior minister at the St Kilda Baptist Church, mayor of St Kilda and was executive director of Urban Seed, a Christian not-for-profit organisation created in response to concern about homelessness, drug abuse and the marginalisation of Melbourne’s street people.

Tim was known as one of the nation’s leading campaigners on social justice issues. He was not afraid to be outspoken and had once been labelled

“that leftist cleric” by former Premier Jeff Kennett.

As a man of great faith, Tim looked to God for guidance when World Vision Australia asked him to become the new CEO.

“I prayed a lot about it,” Tim said shortly after his appointment. “God was saying to me that your next step is international, to make sure there was justice for the poor and the most ignored.

“I have long admired what World Vision does – the very title resonates emotionally and powerfully with me.

“I had always had a sense that my own development, both in terms of spiritual leaning and passion, might be international issues. This is the first step of that journey.”

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THE WAVE THAT CRUSHED ASIA

TIM Costello’s journey with World Vision sped into top gear on the morning of Boxing Day, 2004. A massive undersea earthquake measuring 9.15 on the Richter scale had triggered a series of tsunamis that charged across the Indian Ocean.

The surging waves hit the coastline of 12 countries in South and Southeast Asia, claiming the lives of an estimated 230,000 people, displacing more than a million and causing widespread damage and destruction.

Tim Costello, three months into his role as World Vision CEO, was sitting at the Boxing Day Test when news of the tsunami first came through. He watched the big video screen and saw the numbers of dead were doubling every five minutes. He started ringing his staff and booked a ticket to fly to Sri Lanka.

Within hours, World Vision hit the ground running and mounted its largest single relief response across five countries simultaneously – Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Myanmar – providing immediate relief in the form of life-saving essentials such as food, clean water, shelter and medicines.

In Sri Lanka, Tim Costello was confronted by “the most devastating thing I have still ever experienced”.

“There were literally hundreds and hundreds of dead bodies, mainly children and women,” he said. “They couldn’t run or climb a tree. They were thrown

into mass graves unnamed and unclaimed, unknown in death, just to stop the spread of disease.

“Nothing prepares you for the smell of dead bodies in a humid climate. For many months after I still had nightmares.”

The tsunami devastated Sri Lanka’s coastline, resulting in over 30,000 deaths and the displacement of thousands of households.

Prassana De Silva, working with World Vision’s response team in Sri Lanka, recalled meeting a man who had lost his entire family in the tsunami. He said the man had a blank look in his eyes.

“He looked at me without saying anything for 20 seconds and then said, ‘I lost my wife and two children. My second child’s hand slipped out of my hand. I couldn’t save her.’

“Then this guy put his head to my shoulder and started crying. When you are an aid worker people think you always have answers but I didn’t have any. At that point all I could do was cry with him.”

Even worse was to come in Banda Aceh in Indonesia. Slowly it became apparent that it was the worst hit area, where 160,000 died.

“It was an apocalyptic scene,” recalled Tim Costello. “There were 300,000 survivors in the city just walking like ghosts. There was an eerie silence because people were so traumatised and in shock.”

Despite the horror, Tim found strong expressions of faith in the people most affected. They didn’t ask why an all-powerful and all-loving God would allow a tsunami, he said.

“I found in the tsunami areas, both in Buddhist Sri Lanka and Muslim Banda Aceh, that wasn’t their question. Their question was if I can’t have faith in God at this moment, I can’t ever find the energy to rebuild. I can’t go through what I need to do. Faith was their only resource.”

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AN UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGE AT HOME

IN Australia, World Vision went into overdrive to pull off one of the biggest televised appeals the nation had ever seen.

Andrew Johnston, who was responsible for World Vision Australia’s call centre, was on holiday in Echuca when the call came from Tim Costello on

Boxing Day.

“I had been watching the tsunami news with horror on the banks of the Murray where we stayed when I got the call. It was a stinking hot morning.

“Tim said, ‘I don’t know what I need but I need you to get back here.’

“I listened to the urgency in his voice, knowing that he’d probably received info beyond what I’d been exposed to in the media.

“On the way back to Melbourne, I was glued to the radio listening to the horror unfold and even then there was scant detail.”

Andrew started to call his leadership team – putting them on notice for what was about to take place.

The call centre is the heart of World Vision and it came under enormous strain and opportunity with the tsunami appeal.

On Saturday 1 January, Andrew was told about the Australia Unites: Reach Out to Asia, tsunami concert appeal, which would be broadcast on Channels Seven, Nine and Ten on 8 January.

Andrew and his team had just a few days to assess and pull together a solution to support the tsunami appeal’s expected flood of donations.

“I was immediately calculating what are called trunking calculations,” he said. “This is about how many incoming lines are we going to need. All assumptions were off the table. We had to do something completely out of the box.

“We came up with idea of building a virtual call centre with 2,500 seats (on an ordinary working day, the call centre takes 1,500 to 2,000 calls, and makes about the same in outbound acquisition calls).

“We had the bare bones worked out within four days. I had a horror moment. It’s one thing to build the technical capacity that ties together and distributes calls across 2,500 seats. It’s another thing that the carrier can stand up to that much traffic. There was no precedent for it. We didn’t know what would happen.”

Andrew received calls from around 20 external call centres all offering their site, staff and support. “Bear in mind that this was the beginning of January when most people are on holiday. I couldn’t keep up with the number of call centre operators phoning in to say they wanted to help. What we had to do very quickly, however, was sift through these offers.”

In the end, they opted to go with six sites including the World Vision site, NAB, RACV, Telstra Dome (now named Etihad) and two sites at the UCMS telemarketing group.

On the night of the appeal, the six call centre sites were primarily staffed with volunteers.

“There was one mistake and it’s the closest I’ve come to a heart attack,” said Andrew. “We built this site at Etihad, which was the telecast site where all the TV cameras and celebrities were.

“The broadcast got underway and the room was filled with people anxiously awaiting the first calls. The number went up on the screen and no calls came through to the Etihad site. Calls were going through to the other five sites.

“We had the producers straight on us. ‘This is not good,’ they were shouting at us. They were even talking of getting people to pick up the phone on camera and pretend there was an incoming call from the public.

“What had happened, despite checking and rechecking everything, was that we had transposed two digits on a tie-line that saw calls routed to the site.

“We worked out what had happened and corrected it in three minutes but it was hell. It was the slowest three minutes of my life.

“That was probably the only mistake we made. Thankfully, we found it quickly.

“I think that night we took 35,000 calls. There was a cricket match with Australia vs the rest of the world organised to run three or four days later so we left that architecture in place. World Vision raised $118 million. It was unprecedented in its reach.”

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THE NIGHT RATINGS DIDN’T MATTER

THE World Vision tsunami telethon was the first time the three Australian commercial TV networks – Nine, Seven and Ten – had banded together to simultaneously broadcast an event. It was a rare show of unity among rival networks.

This extraordinary humanitarian response was also telecast through the

networks' regional stations and the ABC and was simulcast on radio networks throughout the nation.

ABC Asia Pacific broadcast Australia Unites: Reach Out to Asia to 52 countries and territories, many of which were directly affected by the tsunami disaster.

The telethon was based at the Telstra Dome in Melbourne, where the main World Vision call centre was also located.

A concert with some of Australia's leading performers was held on the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House.

A 600-strong production crew in Sydney and Melbourne worked around the clock to pull the event together in one week – a massive achievement given that most big-event live television broadcasts are many months in planning.

With ratings on hold, personalities from the three networks, including Nine's Ray Martin and Eddie Maguire, Ten's Rove McManus and Seven's *Sunrise* team, helped present the event.

An estimated 8.6 million Australians tuned in to the event and they gave and gave and gave.

Three hours after the telecast began, $10 million had been raised through telephone, website and SMS donations.

By the end of the broadcast, $15,198,329.20 in donations had been raised. Switchboards remained open after the program, and by 2am the next morning, $20 million had been raised. The final cumulative figure topped $50 million.

World Vision Australia eventually raised more than $118 million dollars for tsunami relief and rehabilitation programs. There was an atmosphere of comradeship and humanity as people gave without bounds. People gave up their savings and spare change with the thought that others needed the money more.

A 10-year-old boy donated his $40 Christmas gift, a New Year's Eve party raised $800, an Australian Navy ship raised $195 and one couple asked guests at their wedding to give donations to the appeal rather than gifts.

At events throughout the country, people continued to give money to aid tsunami victims through garage sales and collections in pubs. At the Pier to Pub swim in Lorne, tin rattlers in swimming trunks wandered among the

crowd collecting donations, while at the annual get-together for the Mountain Cattlemen's Association, more than $1,500 was slipped into the saddlebags of a packhorse that was led through the crowd.

World Vision head Tim Costello said people around the world were saying Australia had set the benchmark for tsunami aid. "For perhaps the first time in our history, Australia actually is so far out in front it's magnificent," he said. "In the wake of such a catastrophic disaster, it is wonderful to see so many Australians pull together and give so generously to the victims of this tragedy."

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BORN ON A MOUNTAINTOP

ON that terrible Sunday morning of the tsunami, Nadia ran for the hills as fast as a heavily pregnant woman could as the rising waters engulfed her village in Banda Aceh.

When they were safely in the densely forested hills above the village, Nadia, her husband and four children rested for a few minutes. That's when she knew the baby was coming.

Nadia asked another woman survivor for help. The woman said she knew nothing about assisting in a birth but agreed to help as well as she could.

And just before midnight on the day when Banda Aceh was devoured by the ocean, a healthy baby boy named Muhammed was born.

His father, Razili, cut the umbilical cord with a machete. The baby was wrapped in rags a neighbour had grabbed from the waters.

Three days later, the family was able to walk from the hills to a displaced persons' camp and lived in a leaky tent with other survivors.

"He slept all the time," Nadia said. "He just woke up when he needed breastfeeding. He was an easy baby."

He was not the only Muhammed born that day in Banda Aceh. Erlinawati, nine months pregnant, ran for her life when the tsunami struck the area.

"I was running with my big belly. I didn't realise it anymore. I forgot that I was pregnant. I just ran.

"Suddenly my water broke. It just came out of me. After that, I was taken into the house and they put me on the ground. I lay down and gave birth. It

didn't take long. Five minutes and my baby Muhammed was born.

"In such emergency conditions, no-one really helped, no midwives," she said.

"There was no equipment, plastic bags were used as gloves and the umbilical cord was cut using a kitchen knife.

"It was a miracle. When I gave birth and found out it was a boy, it was the greatest miracle ever," she said.

"No happiness compares to my giving birth to a healthy baby boy. I already had two girls and now I've got a boy."

Baby Fihinna was born just a day after the tsunami. Her mother was already in labour as she rode a motorbike out of Banda Aceh's wreckage to find a rural hospital with space for her to deliver.

"We arrived at the first hospital; they couldn't receive patients," says Defi, Fihinna's mother. "Then, at the second hospital, the gates were locked. Finally, at the third hospital, there was an obstetrician who could help."

Fihinna was Defi's first child, and the labour was long.

"When the time came to deliver the baby, my husband could not accompany me to the room because a child who was at the hospital alone, whose family had been hit by the tsunami, had fallen asleep on his lap," Defi says. "He didn't want to wake the child. But finally, when my husband heard Fihinna cry, he came, and the doctor told him the baby was safe."

Then there is Furqan, who was only 12 days old when the tsunami roared into his world. Along with his mother, father, two older brothers and 20 neighbours, he survived on the second floor of his home.

In the months after the tsunami, all four families relied on help from aid organisations including World Vision.

Furqan and Fihinna are now students at schools rebuilt by World Vision. Mohammed, the boy born on a mountaintop, is now healthy and happy and lives with his family in a house rebuilt by World Vision.

Dale Amtsberg, former manager of events and ambassador programs at World Vision Australia, met with Muhammed and his family during the 2014 anniversary of the tsunami. They played an improvised game with a plastic ball in the family's driveway.

"He is an amazing kid with a fantastic story," said Dale. "His earliest

memories were around the rebuilding of his town.

“Except for hearing the people’s stories about that day a decade earlier, and the little memorials around the place, you would never know that the tsunami happened. The place has been rebuilt and it is absolutely incredible. The whole area has been rebuilt – schools, roads and bridges. There were new houses that are now homes. Livelihoods have been restored – new fishing boats, coffee shops and roadside stalls selling the dried fish for which Aceh is famous. Lives have been put back together. Families have reunited and new families created.”

In the past 10 years, Muhammed’s house has been rebuilt. His village has been reconstructed and his family’s life has been restored. A lot can happen in 10 years.

Muhammed will never forget what his mum did so he could live. Never forget that, in the darkest times, there is still hope.

In Aceh, World Vision responded with food aid that benefited 150,000 people.

Nadia and Razali remember the food aid, and Furqan’s mother, Nurbaiti, remembers the clothes she received for the baby, along with emergency healthcare.

World Vision built 97 transitional housing centres and 450 temporary homes for the survivors in Banda Aceh. And then permanent, single-family homes for 3,565 families.

World Vision also helped 40,000 people with vocational training and employment opportunities, as well as assisting with providing health clinics and rebuilding infrastructure such as bridges and canals. In addition, the organisation built 84 schools, 33 preschools, and provided other support to 2,000 teachers and 137,000 children.

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ELVO’S MISSION OF MIRTH

IN the midst of chaos, a World Vision clown named Elvo brought some unexpected joy to children anguished by the tsunami.

The children sat in guarded silence when the clown first entered the World Vision Child Friendly Space after the disaster hit Aceh.

Then the laughter began. Hundreds more children slowly emerged from makeshift shelters and tents to watch the clown's mimed performance with a coloured handkerchief and balloon animals.

Elvo, dressed in a red magician's hat and oversized pants, was gently bringing some joy into the hearts of children who had lost their homes, friends and, in some cases, their families.

Keith Lancaster, World Vision's logistics officer for the Indonesian tsunami response, said: "I don't think these kids had seen a clown before, certainly nothing like this guy. He's very funny and very entertaining. And it was a real delight just to see the kids light up despite what had been happening to them. For the time that Elvo was there, they were back to being kids again."

Elvo the Clown is Aaron Ward, a New Zealand actor who normally works in film, TV and live theatre. Sponsored by World Vision, he spent two months at the organisation's activity centres and Child Friendly Spaces in Banda Aceh.

He said it was the hardest trip he's ever done – with bomb threats to World Vision, bad food and extreme heat. With the temperature around 40 degrees, he had to wear long pants and shirts due to clothing restrictions in the Muslim country.

Elvo (an anagram of the word love) had previously supported World Vision's work during the Kosovo crisis in 1999 to help children cope with their stress.

He first thought of taking Elvo to crisis areas after watching an aid worker from Macedonia on TV news.

"She was saying how the kids had forgotten how to be kids because they'd just come out with only the clothes they had on, no toys, nothing. They'd seen horrific scenes, people dying, losing their parents. I just thought no-one should have to experience that, especially children."

"Dad said to me straight away, 'Oh, you could go over and do your clowning, couldn't you?' I just thought that was a really strange thing, because I didn't even contemplate that I could do that."

Soon after, he was committed to the idea.

"I just thought, 'I've got to do this, I have to do it. No matter what else happens, I'm doing this.'"

He sat on the floor of his flat rifling through the phonebook, trying to find

humanitarian organisations that would send him over.

“But no one was sending volunteers at that time because it was too dangerous.”

Ward eventually got the go-ahead from World Vision. A few weeks later, he was on a plane to Croatia. After arriving in Dubrovnik, Ward missed the message from World Vision saying the border would be closed the next day.

“I turned up at the border in a taxi with all my gear and started talking to all these guards at the Croatian side. I was trying to figure out how to say ‘I’m a clown’. I was wearing my red top hat at the time. That’s what I wear as Elvo.”

The guards still didn’t understand.

“So I ended up doing a little show for them, blowing up balloon animals, doing a bit of juggling. And they were all sitting around laughing, and then they all just let me through.”

In Banda Aceh, one doctor told Elvo that he was having trouble holding back the tears as he watched the children he had been dealing with for the past two months suddenly laughing and playing.

“I know in my heart that the fun and laughter I have brought will stay with these people for many years to come and I like to think that, perhaps in some cases, it has been the difference between them being lost in this horrible situation and them regaining hope and carrying on,” said Elvo.

“There is a lot that we can all do to make this world a better place. We just need to do whatever it is that will make a good difference to people’s lives and to this wonderful, incredible and beautiful world we live in.”

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RESILIENCE IN THE AFTERMATH

THE scale of destruction caused by the tsunami was unprecedented and the logistical challenges of meeting the needs of those affected were enormous.

World Vision has three categories of disasters, with category three covering disasters affecting one million people spread across a wide geographic area. The Indian Ocean tsunami was like five simultaneous category three

disasters.

Members of World Vision's Global Rapid Response Team – formed in the late 1990s – were in the key disaster areas within 24 hours after the Asian tsunami hit.

The first priority of the Global Rapid Response Team – affectionately known in World Vision circles as "the cowboys" or "the Thunderbirds" – was to save lives and stop the spread of disease. The team distributed food, clean water, shelter huts and hygiene products and, in Indonesia, prayer mats accessed from pre-stocked warehouses around the world and flown into disaster areas.

Another priority was the protection of children, especially those left vulnerable because they have lost parents or carers, or have been left homeless. Child Friendly Spaces were set up quickly to safeguard the youngest victims.

World Vision mounted 32 airlifts to Aceh and Sri Lanka alone in the first 30 days after the big waves hit. In the first few months, World Vision reached 150,000 people in Banda Aceh and about 70,000 in Sri Lanka.

It helped tremendously that World Vision had been working among the poorest communities in many of the affected countries for many years. In the wake of the tsunami, World Vision was able to work closely with local authorities.

Once the affected nations were safely beyond the survival stage, World Vision involved local communities in assessing their needs and establishing how the aid organisation could help. This was the work of development aid workers.

Tim Costello said many of the tsunami victims were at first reluctant to rebuild their houses. "It would take several months for people to want to rebuild. They'd say, 'I can't even trust the ground I'm standing on. I can't trust the sea where I made my livelihood. I'm not ready to rebuild my house.'"

Ian Curtis, the Asia Tsunami Response Team director at the time, arrived in Aceh seven days after the tsunami. "It was like a bomb had gone off," he said. "We thought there is no way this place can be rebuilt. We thought we'd have to bulldoze it all into the sea and start again. But within six months you could get your photos developed and buy mag wheels. Talk

about the resilience of the human spirit. It was incredible.

“Fortunately, the tsunami did not take the major capital cities so we could easily set up supply chains. That made it a lot easier.”

Ian said his team was “clobbered” because they didn’t build permanent homes quickly enough.

“The reality was that I was not going to build a thing until the government in Jakarta had passed the new anti-earthquake legislation and specified new building standards.

“I said, ‘There’s no way I’m going to build a two-story schoolhouse and have it fall down with the next earthquake.’

“For eight months we put people into temporary accommodation and the media clobbered us. When they passed the legislation, we started building. We only had to rebuild two houses out of 4,000 houses, 150 clinics and 200 high schools. There was short-term pain and long-term gain.”

Another problem was the reputation of Indonesian officials as corrupt. Aid agencies, including World Vision Australia, feared that money pledged for Aceh’s reconstruction and rehabilitation would end up in the pockets of Indonesian generals.

“Pat Kintoro, the anti-corruption czar put in charge of Banda Aceh said there would be no corruption,” said Tim Costello.

“I was there thinking this guy was Woody Allen or Mick Dundee. Everyone fell about laughing. No corruption? That’s a joke.”

But Kintaro was true to his word. The donated money was used to build entire towns of new homes, schools and hospitals, bridges and roads, rehabilitate rice paddies and repair drainage systems.

“He was such an incredible leader with such high standards,” said Tim Costello. “We had PricewaterhouseCoopers auditing our books and we knew corruption did not happen. This was a first in Indonesia.”

Tim revisited Aceh in 2014. “I could not recognise where I was,” he said. “I saw the best roads in Indonesia, the most beautiful houses, children laughing and playing, businesses throughout the streets and hustle bustle commerce. It was a miracle.”

BEASTS EASE THE BURDEN

ACTS of kindness have transformed a community in Uganda.

World Vision distributed hundreds of chickens, roosters and goats to the community and asked each recipient family to pass on the first female animal offspring to another family.

The livelihood project distributed one hen, rooster and goat to 600 households across the district, as well as another 300 goats to other households and 40 male goats for communities to share.

Freddy Onguu, a livelihoods officer for the local World Vision project, said that the idea of distributing animals was to improve the income and nutritional status of households in the district. “The project goal,” he said, “is to enable families to meet their basic needs to live on a sustained basis.”

These acts of kindness would help countless more families to improve their livelihood and became the start of a pay-it-forward wave of change for the district in Uganda.

Christine’s family was grateful to receive animals from their neighbour Korina after her livestock had their first female offspring.

A mother of five, Korina was crippled in 2008 and had found it hard to support her family. She received her chicken, rooster and goat in the first World Vision distribution.

Korina has already started to see the benefits of raising her animals. The goat and chickens are a source of nutritious food and she has sold some for extra money. This income has helped her to pay for school uniforms for her children.

Christine sold the rooster Korina gave her, earning 35,000 shillings (about $14). Christine’s youngest son Tony, aged five, is happy that his mother has been able to use the income from their new animals to buy food, including beans and sesame seeds. She has also bought school uniforms for Tony’s older siblings, Fiona and Jimmy.

Christine dreams of a bright future with the income from their animals. “If the goats and chickens multiply, I would love to open up more land to cultivate,” she said.

When Christine too passes on the first offspring of her hen and goat, another family will be able to earn a better income and enjoy better nutrition.

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THE LESSON OF THE FALLEN TREE

AT a National Young Leaders Day for secondary schools, Tim Costello told a remarkable story about leadership and commitment.

At the time of the story, Tim's friend Dave Young, later to become chief operating officer for World Vision International, was 24 years old and in Africa for the first time.

He was on the back of a truck that had driven out two hours from a major city along a track with potholes big enough to swallow trucks.

After a bone-jarring 10 kilometre trip, the truck pulled to a halt because a massive tree trunk was blocking the road. The bush was thick and the truck could not get around.

Dave and his companions got off the back of the truck to see a lone African with a tomahawk frantically chopping away at the huge trunk.

They backed up their truck and put on chains but there was still no way the truck could get around the tree.

Suddenly, Africans started appearing out of the bush. Dave didn't know who they were or where they'd come from. But they were there to help.

Dave recalls putting his shoulder to the trunk and heaving on the count of three with all the others. But this tree was such a dead weight that it barely shuddered. It seemed hopeless.

Someone said, 'Let's have one last go.' Dave put his shoulder in a second time and remembers a frail old African man who had just come out of the bush, snuggling in next to him to help lift.

Dave remembers looking at the old man and thinking, 'Fat lot of good you're going to do.'

Then the old African began to sing. Dave didn't know the song but the Africans did.

They waited because there was a crescendo coming. And then when the song hit a particular note, they all knew to heave and this massive tree trunk budged a centimetre. They took a breather, put their shoulders in again and as the old man sang it moved another centimetre.

"Dave said, 'We sang and heaved 50 or 60 times, centimetre by centimetre

until there was enough room for the truck to squeeze past,'" said Tim.

"He said this was the most important lesson for his future as a consultant. He said the mission never changed. It was to move the massive tree trunk. The strategy never changed. What changed was a frail African man's song that reached into their hearts and drew out something that wasn't there before. A song got them into alignment where their energy seemed to be maximised.

"Leadership is actually reaching in and drawing out of people something they don't know is there."

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A STARK REALITY OF HOPE

ANDREW Johnston was literally watching life and death when visiting one of World Vision's HIV projects in Soweto.

"It was one of those moments I got to connect with the real world in the field," he said.

There, Andrew met a woman aid worker who was working seven days a week despite suffering from tuberculosis and the effects of HIV infection.

"She was quite unwell but committed to the projects," he said. "She took me into a house to see a young man named Isaac. On my first glimpse of Isaac under the covers in his bed in a tin hut with dusty floors, I noticed his yellow eyes.

"As I adapted to the light, I could see a very gaunt man. His two-year-old daughter was playing around my legs and then I saw his heavily-pregnant wife in the corner. She also had AIDS but it was unsure whether the baby she was carrying was HIV infected."

A World Vision worker told Andrew that Isaac was critically ill with full-blown AIDS and tuberculosis. But there was hope that in the following days he may be able to get back on his tuberculosis meds to then allow his anti-retroviral meds to resume.

"I was struck simultaneously by this despairing situation that this guy was on death's doorstep – and I wondered how this could possibly work out well – and yet there was optimism in that hut.

"I asked whether the man would get better if he could get back on the anti-

retrovirals and was told, ‘Yes, we see this all the time. We see people at his level of ill health actually recover enough to live for a considerably longer time and we think we can get this man back to that.’

“There was this unyielding positivity and optimism at work. I wondered how I could reconcile this. How can I put these two things together?

“I took so much out of that place. I count myself so lucky. There are many reasons to despair when you’re exposed to this stuff that we’ve all seen in the field but you don’t have to look too far to see those signs of optimism. There are a lot of things to be positive about.”

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PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

IN natural disasters, women are much more likely to die than men. Four times as many women as men died in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

In 1991, during the cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, of the 140,000 people who died, 90 percent were women.

The startling statistics often relate to the household and reproductive roles of women. This includes their responsibility for children and elderly in the event of a disaster and their reduced ability to survive some physical threats.

Women are also increasingly vulnerable to sexual violence in emergency situations. The separation of women from families and communities in the context of a breakdown of law and order means that sexual violence often takes place.

The poorest and most vulnerable members of a community – the children, pregnant women, the elderly, the homeless – tend to be hardest hit in a disaster.

Protection of the most vulnerable is a vital part of World Vision’s work in disaster zones.

In 2006, World Vision Australia funded research to identify and collate all the standards and indicators that related to protection under the guidance of Kate Sutton, a protection specialist for several years on the Global Rapid Response Team for World Vision Australia.

“When an emergency happens, there are all sorts of things to do which

include education, training and support to different segments of the population," she said. "It's also about understanding the population well before an emergency happens. It's about understanding who is the most vulnerable.

"In Hurricane Katrina, the American authorities had all these people in hospitals and nobody thought about how they were going to evacuate a whole load of people with disabilities and elderly people from old persons' homes. So it's about thinking before the emergency actually happens. "Understanding who is vulnerable in the population, having that mapped out and thinking about how you can help the particularly vulnerable groups in an emergency.

"The particular risks to women have to be taken into account with disaster preparedness and planning. A lot of that is about education and training for women themselves so they understand what the risks and hazards are in their community, so if you're working with families that live in a landslip prone area it's education about when those landslips happen and what seasons and times they are most vulnerable and where they would go if a landslip occurs."

There are common factors in emergencies. Gender-based violence and sexual abuse rise especially among displaced people.

"When I was on the World Vision Rapid Response Team we were deployed to Kenya after the elections in 2008," said Kate.

"People had been working in camps for two or three months and we did a protection assessment. Police were responsible for management of that particular camp and we found girls had to give sexual favours to them to get underwear. That sort of thing happens in an emergency and we know it happens. We found out what the girls needed and provided it so there was no need for girls to provide sex to the police.

"The whole thing I love about protection is that it's really simple changes and simple adaptations that you can make to keep people safe," she said.

"There are obviously broad protection programs that can be expensive, like registering refugees. Then there's the really basic stuff. When I was in Afghanistan there were babies that fell into wells and died because there were no covers to the wells. So there are very simple steps that you can take like putting locks on toilet doors and covers on wells to keep people safe and treated with dignity."

Kate's passion for protection was sparked when she was working in Afghanistan.

"I was standing on the border and we were dealing with people wanting to bring dead bodies back to Afghanistan to bury them and people travelling on trucks were being treated in the most horrendous ways. Then you had women being abused in safe houses. I looked at that situation and knew there was so much more to humanitarian aid than just giving people a truck to ride on to get back home. We had to treat people in a way we want to be treated, which is so fundamental to Christianity. It became something I felt passionate about."

Protection is challenging without support from local authorities in an emergency.

Kate's team faced that challenge when two young boys – who were related – were brought across the Afghanistan border from Iran.

The boys were not communicating but there were no local child protection services to refer them to.

While staying in an aid agency guesthouse, the older boy was found sexually abusing the younger boy.

"It was a devastating situation because there was nowhere for them to go," said Kate. "There was no support system for them to be referred to. We were limited as international aid workers because everything we take for granted in our society, like safe houses, doesn't exist.

"The thing that's made all this work worthwhile for me is when I've been working with national counterparts. The thing that makes a real difference to me is when I see the person I've been working directly with, for six months or whatever, has gained a really strong understanding of protection and has been able to influence the way of responding to emergencies in their country. That's where I get my strength because we leave the country and I can't be there holding the protection banner and talking about keeping people safe as well as giving them food and tents. You can hand out food and tents and it's all tangible. As soon as you talk about giving safety, because it doesn't come in a box, people don't think about it. It takes a moment of realisation that it's important making sure people are safe and being treated with dignity."

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HOW ON EARTH DO THEY COPE?

THERE is nothing that can prepare you for how it will feel to have a child die in your arms, to see people living in misery, to see bodies piling up in the streets, to hear thousands begging for help and not have enough for everyone.

Life can be dangerous and gruelling – both physically and emotionally – for those who want to change the world as a humanitarian aid worker. It's more than a job; it's a calling.

World Vision's emergency aid workers endure harsh travelling conditions into desperate situations. They often clamber onto small planes to travel to conflict-laden zones, leaving behind their husbands or wives and children for months at a time.

They are housed in tiny, usually substandard quarters, often without running water and with no access to most creature comforts.

They are isolated from their friends, family and support networks when dealing with crises, whether physical or mental. When they return home, aid workers often struggle to describe their experiences and challenges to those who don't understand the mission.

The emotional toll of this dirty, dangerous, faith-challenging work can be huge.

"I do despair," said long-time World Vision aid worker Judy-Leigh Moore. "I question God a lot. I even shout at Him. Prayer plays a huge part in coping. So does being able to talk to others. I have friends that I can talk to in confidence, who I know will listen to me and not judge me or my decisions. Generally when things look too big, too immense, too overwhelming, I just say to myself, 'Baby steps. One step at a time. Just help one family at a time.' I say that I am not totally responsible for the whole community by myself. I am part of a team."

World Vision's former manager of events and ambassador programs, Dale Amtsberg, said the first 24 hours after returning home from a field trip were usually the most difficult.

"I used to live in an apartment building that had a pool and I once came back from the drought-affected areas of Kenya and jumped into the pool to

feel clean," he said.

"It was the worst thing I could have done because you could not get more of a dichotomy between my life and theirs.

"When I came back from a few weeks in the Middle East working with Syrian refugees, it was my partner's birthday dinner. I was a little late and when I walked in, people were talking about parking fines. Completely normal chit chat but in my head I felt like turning over the table and walking out. But I know that was more about me than them.

"I occasionally get angry. But I've seen so much of our work where I have absolute confidence in what we do. You meet people whose lives have changed and that's very reassuring. And going to the field to see our work always re-energises me."

Aid worker Keith Lancaster said emergency workers have to disassociate enough to be able to function.

"If there's something to be done, you can't afford to fall in a heap otherwise you become a liability," he said. "So you just learn, to some extent, to set aside the really strong emotions that might be coming through and process those later on.

"Sometimes it might mean later that evening or it might mean when you come back home and have a bit of a debrief with someone. You are working with other people who are going through the same thing. And sometimes just chatting that evening with them about kids that we've seen dying is helpful.

"There are some smells in particular that bring you back in a hurry. Some sights and sounds. And sometimes you just recount a story in public or in a one-on-one situation, and it all comes back. I get to think about some things and wonder whether I would share or open up about it because I'm not sure if I can handle it.

"There are some things I still won't start talking about unless I'm comfortable."

Ian Wishart was director of World Vision Australia's emergency response unit for several years.

"I've seen, over the years, the most unbelievable and extreme suffering anyone can see, whether it was the genocide in Rwanda or starvation in Ethiopia," he said. "It does affect you.

“Some of the crises are unimaginable.”

Kevin Gray, World Vision Australia’s chief financial officer for three decades, finds an answer in faith.

“If what we are doing is a calling from God, then God doesn’t want us to fall apart,” he said.

Dave Toycen, World Vision Australia’s communications director who became CEO at World Vision Canada, said: “For me, it’s always been a pragmatic practical approach. Just being human means that being in these situations could drive you crazy. I’m a Christian and I think what sustains me is my faith in the midst of these outrageous, irrational situations.

“To a certain extent, it’s a bit of narcissism if you’re not careful. You can get taken up so much in your own feelings, which are understandable, but I would always say to myself, ‘What are all these feelings actually going to do for the people I’m here with who I may be able, in a small way be a part of a modest solution or temporary assistance?’ So I always tried to move to that. The practical reality of what we can do.”

Tim Costello’s first trip as World Vision Australia’s CEO was to Darfur in the Sudan. He wept at a post-visit press conference.

“I broke down in that press conference after my first humanitarian disaster,” he said. “What shocked me was the huge numbers. I sort of knew in my head what it was about but what shocked me was that every woman I spoke to had either been raped or her sister or daughter had been raped. I had not understood before how rape is such a systematic tool of war.

“What you do is learn to build a fence around your emotions. The trouble is the fence leaks. I will find myself giving a speech which isn’t even about World Vision – it might be a social, happy occasion – and from nowhere I’ll see a scene from what I’ve seen in Darfur or the tsunami and I’ll be in tears. No warning. So you realise the fence leaks and part of it is the guilt that you’ve left and they are still there. That you are not quite up to explaining the seriousness of it to Aussies who listen and their eyes glaze over and they go, ‘Who’s playing in the cricket tonight?’

“I handle it from faith and I think that’s why World Vision’s Christian faith is so important. It’s the sense that this is God’s world. He hasn’t given up on a broken world so what right do we have to give up? Faith is not all about me and it’s not all about the secular messages of salvation – be whatever you

want to be; look good, feel good. It's actually about transcendence. It's saying when you find a cause beyond yourself, you actually find far greater happiness and meaning and it comes at a cost but it's far deeper and far more life-giving."

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VISIONS OF GOOD AND EVIL

A BOY walking along a river bank sees a crocodile trapped in a net.

The animal pleads to be freed, but the boy is afraid the crocodile will kill him once released. The crocodile reassures the boy, but when released, does indeed grab the child in his jaws.

"So this is what I get for my good actions," the boy cries.

"Well, don't take it personally," the crocodile says. "This is the way of the world."

The late spiritual author Anthony de Mello used the story to illustrate that there was no reasonable explanation for suffering, evil, torture and destruction. Sometimes, awful things just seem to happen.

"You can try gamely with your formulas, religious or otherwise, but you will never explain it. Because life is a mystery, which means your thinking mind can make no sense of it," de Mello said.

There is chaos in the world. A tidal wave kills hundreds in Bangladesh, a car skids off the road in Melbourne, a tubercular baby coughs in a Bombay slum and hundreds of Africans are massacred.

Only the most insensitive can ignore the tragedy of man's dilemma; can fail to question war, suffering and injustice and wonder where God is.

The performance of evil by ordinary people is one of the most disturbing social phenomena. It is not confined to one state or one nation.

To continue to trust in grace, love, kindness and generosity is difficult in a world gone mad.

What we need is faith that we can do more than survive. Ultimately, we are citizens of heaven and this apparent global madness will probably make sense when we finally escape the shadowlands.

Former CEO Harold Henderson said World Vision did not underestimate the power of evil, neither did it believe evil had the last word. "We think that

hope, love, compassion and justice are the things that have the last word," he said.

Ian Wishart, who was director of World Vision Australia's emergency response unit, recalled meeting a Palestinian priest who told him, "Nothing is black and white; nothing is exactly good or evil. Just look and learn."

"Certainly I did see a lot of evil and I think I had a more profound understanding of what evil is – an exercise of power over one person by another in an abusive way, whether through murder or rape or subtle forms," said Ian.

"But the thing you understand in a historical context is that, under the right conditions, any one of us is capable of this unfortunately. My theology changed tremendously from fairly black and white simplistic to much more nuanced and much more grey and complex. I'm appreciating that every human being has possibilities."

Former marketing and communications director John Rose talked of encountering the reality of evil on his first overseas trip with World Vision. He was in Haiti, the poorest nation in the northern hemisphere, where voodoo is an official religion.

"From a Christian's point of view, I believed in the presence of evil in the world but I had no idea what evil personified in the world really meant. And yet I came face to face with it in Haiti at that time," said John.

"I'm talking about evil in the spiritual realm, as well as within the government realm. Voodoo had started to creep into church practice in Haiti and the very nature of thinking about that was mind-blowing for me.

"For someone who had grown up in a reasonably sheltered church and Western environment, just understanding the cultural dimensions of evil was overwhelming. I saw the evidence of poverty and real malnutrition and kids who had little hope of getting to five years of age because of this evil."

Another profound experience for John was the Kosovo conflict. "I went over soon after the conflict had started and realised people who were living side by side in neighbouring communities had no trust. People were turning against their former friends.

"In Zimbabwe, I saw the slums and yet you had kids who had the joy and hope and you realise that they are making an existence and being contented in that context. The hope that was within them was that they

could be released if they were given a decent start in life. Those are the things that stayed with me.

“It made me aware of the underside of life. Of the underside of society. I see the good in people but I also see the presence of evil and sometimes I saw the structural evil that is insidious and works against society.

“I coped by my faith and my faith’s journey. There’s a sense in which, as a Christian, you see the world as how you want to see it. For every heartbreaking story there’s one that actually lifts your spirits. And sometimes it’s the same story.

“You see a story of a child who has been abandoned, hurt or abused but you see the spirit and a spark within them. And they basically just need the nurturing and love to get them through.”

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MEL DOYLE’S BIGGEST INFLUENCE

ON a trip to cover the Syrian refugee crisis, World Vision ambassador and journalist Melissa Doyle met a young girl in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon who “affected me more than anyone I’ve met during my whole career”.

Hind was a beautiful and well-spoken 15-year-old whose father had owned a supermarket in Homs, once a pretty city in western Syria with a population of just over a million people.

Hind and her family had lived in a three-storey home with a rose garden that was famous in the neighbourhood.

She attended school, went to the movies with her girlfriends and did all those normal things that a 15-year-old does.

And suddenly the place was bombed and the supermarket and house were gone. The terrified family fled across the border into eastern Lebanon.

Now they lived in a UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency) tent pitched in the rubble of a building site in the Bekaa Valley, surviving on food vouchers.

“The mother kept apologising,” said Melissa. “She felt embarrassed that we were sitting in this cardboard-lined tent draped with a white tarpaulin in an attempt to keep the winter snow off. She was mortified and kept talking about their old house and the rose garden and all the things that they once

had.

“But this young girl Hind was so strong and positive. She was determined to go back to school to finish her education and become a teacher.

“She wanted to make a difference and I was really affected by her. I found myself having this bond with her. I had a little guardian angel pin on my camera bag. It was all I could give her that meant something.

“I am in no doubt she will survive and find a way to make her dreams of being a teacher come true. She has her dignity and her future, just not the way she had expected.

“Back home I put a photo of Hind on my desk. Some people you meet just touch you so deeply. I always try to find the silver lining in life and I’m always amazed by the optimism of some people in crisis situations.”

Melissa’s first trip was to Mongolia in 2006, where she met her sponsored child named Khulan.

“That had a big impact on me because I had never seen the work of World Vision firsthand. I think, to have that experience and to see it in the field, to see what World Vision does and the difference that you make, is wonderful.

“It’s all well and good to read about it and hear about it but for me to see it firsthand made such an impact and so that [has] probably been the greatest driver of my passion for what World Vision does ever since. It just got me hooked. I’m on board. I firmly believe.”

For Melissa Doyle, the World Vision journeys are personal. She has had the good fortune of recently meeting another of her sponsored children, an Ethiopian boy named Elyas.

“Elyas was delightful and the village turned out to greet me and his mum hugged me and I think that had the biggest impact,” said Melissa.

“The mother looked at me with the look of gratitude or appreciation that seemed to say she appreciated the little bit I’d been able to do to help them.

“People underestimate what it does for you; it opens your eyes and your heart.”

On Melissa’s 2006 visit to Khulan in Mongolia, she saw poverty “like I’ve never seen before”.

“It was poverty that I had never imagined or experienced and I know a lot of

the criticism of world agencies is that people say charity starts back here but I think to myself that our poorest of the poor here are nowhere near the poorest of the poor in places like Mongolia."

Seven years later, after her first trip to Mongolia, she returned with her 12-year-old son Nicholas.

She described her return to Mongolia as like a dream come true. "To reunite with my World Vision sponsor child Khulan and share the experience with my son Nicholas, that has been unforgettable.

"It was wonderful to see Khulan doing so well in school. She knows the work of World Vision is making a difference. It completely drove home why I sponsor her.

"And for my son this was an eye-opener. He lives in a good part of the world and doesn't want for anything and, for him to see that not everyone has the life he does, will hopefully give him a passion and understanding he otherwise would not have had.

"I see it as my duty to tell the next generation about these realities.

"Working as a journalist on these World Vision TV specials is always moving. I know I have a job to do. But it's not that easy. If I come away from these situations and I'm not moved, not emotional and not changed in some way then something's wrong. I never want to be that hardened as a journalist that my humanity doesn't come first.

"I thank God I can walk out of there and I can feel things and I can cry. But I'm grateful that I can come home and have this sense of purpose. To know that we are doing good things and can make a difference."

There's a postscript to Melissa Doyle's recent visit to Mongolia with her son Nicholas, told by World Vision's former manager of events and ambassador programs, Dale Amtsberg.

"It was the Mongolian summer with beautiful weather," said Dale.

"Young Nick had brought an Aussie Rules football with him and wanted to give it to a Mongolian kid. We convinced him to wait until the end of the trip to do that.

"So we had this great week on the Mongolian steppe to kick the footy around with all this space around us.

"One day Mel was talking with the film crew from Channel Seven so Tim

Costello, Nick and I were kicking this footy around and Tim, who was acting like a big kid, was giving the commentary – 'And Costello takes a beautiful mark … and yes, he goals!'

"Well Tim kicked the ball off the side of his foot and the ball headed straight for this beautiful Mongolian house with all this beautiful fine china just inside the door. We all watched as the ball bounced a metre above the door, just missing the solar panel that World Vision had installed to give the family an electricity source.

"We had all this space on the Mongolian steppe where Genghis Khan had marched his massive armies through and we managed to nearly hit a house."

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ON THE BACK ROADS WITH TRACEY

RESPECTED newsreader and journalist Tracey Spicer rates the video documentaries she has made on the work of World Vision among the highlights of her career.

Some of her stories have been heartbreaking.

In India, she discovered the rise of gender-selected abortions because families preferred sons who could earn more money to support them.

Tracey interviewed a young pregnant woman who went to what she thought was an ultrasound and saw a syringe pointing towards her stomach.

Her husband had told the doctor to inject her with an abortion drug, which had sadly become a common practice in her village south of New Delhi.

At the last moment, the woman realised what was happening, and screamed "stop" to save her unborn child.

The doctor was wrong; she was pregnant with a boy. The woman now volunteers at a World Vision project to help empower hundreds of women in her community.

She told Tracey of another woman who had three girls. When an ultrasound revealed a fourth baby was a girl, the husband gave poison to the mother. Both she and the baby died.

"You might think things are improving in India because of an emerging

middle class," said Tracey.

"But the wealth means they are able to access more sophisticated ultrasound equipment so they know a woman is going to have a girl child and there are more abortions now. So the gender disparity is actually increasing."

Yet there is hope for change.

"We saw these support groups for women encouraging them to treat their girl children equally to their boy children. And I had women say to me, 'Now I don't feel guilty about feeding my girl daughter,' because previously they felt they had been going against their communities by feeding their daughters as much as their sons.

"All of a sudden they felt empowered to treat their daughters as well as their sons and that really made my heart swell."

At a World Vision Child Restoration project in New Delhi, Tracey met two 10-year-old girls, both named Arti, who had worked as ragpickers, the lowest of the low in Indian society.

From the age of four, they would spend the morning collecting plastic, cans and bottles to sell to recycling companies, then go begging in the afternoon to earn the equivalent of 30 cents a day.

With World Vision's help, the girls' lives were transformed. Both now go to school and want to be teachers.

In Bangladesh, Tracey and a World Vision team drove nine hours out of the capital to a school for girls that World Vision had set up.

"It put the biggest smile on my face because this was the kind of area where once only the boys were educated and the girls didn't get an education. To see these little girls in their school uniforms in a tiny little hut where a school had been set up brought tears to my eyes.

"It was a remote area and when we had been driving for about six hours I really needed to go to the toilet. I couldn't hold on.

"So I asked the bus driver if we could pull up somewhere. He pulled over near a field and said, 'Just go over and squat in the field. There's no-one around.' Sure enough, there was no-one there when I walked over to squat but, by the time I squatted, there were about a hundred people surrounding me just looking at how a white woman goes to the toilet."

In Kenya, Tracey was driven three and a half hours north from Nairobi to a remote area.

“We stumbled across a family that was literally one day away from death. A man had two wives and lots of children and the local animals had fouled their well, which was nine kilometres’ walk away.

“They hadn’t had fresh water for such a long time and were very close to death. We got them some fresh water and rice to get them through the next couple of weeks. But on top of that, it was really wonderful to alert World Vision people locally that in this area that had happened to the well and a project was started and the well was cleaned up. Finally they had water again.

“I guess that’s one of the great grassroots stories. When you’re making these documentaries for World Vision, you stumble across these families and you think, ‘Oh my goodness if World Vision wasn’t working in such remote areas these people would have starved to death.’”

In Dhaka, Tracey was warned by World Vision staff not to hand money out the window to people surrounding her van.

“I thought I had my reporter’s shield on,” she said. “We drove out of the airport and got to the main street and pulled up at a set of traffic lights. And sure enough, there were 50 people surrounding us, shoving their hand in to get money. I just felt so sad for these people because a lot of the children had their faces deliberately mutilated to make them better beggars.

“I had small currency so I gave some to children out the window. Minutes later, there were about 200 people around us rocking the van trying to tip it over to get money from the rich Westerners, which is understandable because they are so desperate. It taught me a lesson that, even though you’re in these countries and moved by the stories, you still have to remain, to a degree, distant to be able to effectively help them the most.

“I always come back from World Vision trips feeling incredibly heartened at the grassroots work that is being done. India is a prime example of that. It was wonderful to travel with World Vision through a remote area where most of the girls were brought up to be prostitutes; to discover they now have options ongoing with schools being built in the area.

“So now the girls have a choice of being educated and married or prostitution. At least they now have that choice.”

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A SUPERMODEL COMES TO PERU

JESSICA Gomes, supermodel and one of World Vision's newest celebrity ambassadors, wore a simple t-shirt and jeans – and no makeup – when visiting a school in the outback of Peru.

She went with "an open heart" and no pretensions when she spent a week seeing firsthand how World Vision is empowering children and women through healthcare, education and small business projects.

Jessica found the experience away from the catwalks and high fashion photo shoots both eye-opening and inspiring.

"I learnt so much from this trip," she said. "I felt privileged to be a witness to everything World Vision does in Peru. They're not only about giving money, but also about making their projects sustainable so that these communities can move on by themselves."

Jessica has worked with some of the top names in the fashion business, including *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Italian GQ* and *Teen Vogue*. Her campaigns include Victoria's Secret, Adidas, Gap and DKNY Denim, but she's best known for her six appearances in the famous swimsuit edition of *Sports Illustrated*.

Jessica has been a World Vision supporter since she was a child participating in the 40 Hour Famine with her sisters.

"My mother was a carer for the elderly and my father is a builder," she said. "My parents taught me about love and justice and being a kind and caring human. Through their work, they have set a strong example for me in helping one another as equals. I feel like I want to do good in this world and to touch people. I love loving. And I want to help where I can use my celebrity to spread goodness around the world."

In Peru, Jessica was delighted to be out of her comfort zone. "It was definitely a humbling experience for me," she said.

At a health centre, she was greeted by little Moses, who spontaneously threw his arms around the model.

"He was such a cute, sweet little boy," she said. "He was one of my favourite kids. I'll always remember him. His spirit and his soul. All the

children stole my heart but I fell in love with Moses."

Jessica was also impressed by the spirit of strong women she met on her trip.

"One thing really resonated with me in Peru is that all women have one goal – to give the best life for their children, no matter what their circumstance," she said.

"I saw women who work so hard to keep their babies safe, happy and healthy. All they want for their children is for them to go to school, have an education and have fresh food and water. They want shelter and warmth.

"Poverty has no race, poverty has no gender. We are full of love and love is infinite. I felt that infinite love from these women and children. I felt authentic love. I felt their joy and their excitement for what lies ahead. I was no more fortunate than them. I felt the exact same way they did about life and what the future holds. These women were so strong and I was inspired by their strength."

Jessica said her role as World Vision ambassador had changed her "massively".

"I am so lucky. I appreciate this thing we call life. I'm very aware of world issues. World Vision has given me so much richness and knowledge. I'm so grateful for the experiences I've had. The memories I've had with the World Vision teams [are] priceless. I've grown so much from my experience with World Vision and become a better person.

"It's the only charity that I have been connected to my whole life. It means that I can now understand it fully by witnessing firsthand what World Vision does for communities.

"The work I've seen is beyond what I could have ever imagined. The education and wisdom is giving much to these communities and helping them be sustainable."

Jessica describes her work with World Vision as grounding. "I love it. It teaches me to appreciate every experience for what it is. I'm happy with nothing and I'm happy with everything. I have learnt to want less and to just be. I love that I can experience everything in this life. I'm happiest when I'm sharing stories and being surrounded by beautiful, happy people."

A SHELTER FROM THE WARLORD

JOSEPH Kony was the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a guerrilla group which used to operate in Uganda.

Kony, the madman who proclaimed himself the spokesperson of God, ordered the abduction of an estimated 66,000 children to become his sex slaves or child soldiers.

A decade ago, former World Vision Australia chief financial officer Kevin Gray visited the children of war in northern Uganda that World Vision cared for, with wholesale funding from a major Australian donor he sourced. He said it was the best program he had seen because "it served the greatest need I ever saw".

After his trip, Kevin wrote that Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army was "a poor advertisement for Christianity".

"World Vision's rehabilitation centre in Gulu is a slightly more authentic advertisement for Christianity," he said. Due to the child soldier exodus, it has grown from treating 160 kids to saving 600 traumatised war veterans aged from eight to 18 years old. Gulu's maximum accommodation capacity is 250.

"The tormented human overflow is cramped in makeshift tents within the compound, where a volleyball court was last time we were here. Removal of bullets from teenage bodies is being expertly performed by the local doctor. He finds it more fulfilling than writing scripts for antibiotics back home. HIV-infected girls are given anti-retroviral drugs to prevent AIDS.

"Healing their minds is a little more complicated. When you have shot and dismembered dozens of people before your 13th birthday, you need more than a shoulder to cry on."

Kevin pondered the future for the child soldiers when they left the World Vision compound to return home.

"What do you tell Richard, gang-marched into a rebel army at age 12, and now eight years later he came back a hardened killer? 'Just get over it' isn't enough. Do you start him in Year 7 with the 12 year olds? Would you teach him to butcher cattle instead of dismembering men? Will you plead with his parents who refuse to take him home for fear of violence? I looked into Richard's eyes this afternoon and there was nobody in there. He doesn't know who he is either, but is eager to learn. Mercifully, there are skilled

Ugandans here to help him.

“Girls taken to Sudan many years ago have all come back with children – some have three or four. The family welcome the girls back but often refuse to take the illegitimate sons of rebels. The centre has had to care for 70 of these, many in hospital, left behind when girls were taken home minus unwanted dependents. Babies born in captivity (as they call it here) are lowest in the status hierarchy. When later they get into normal playground fights, it confirms the label of wild savages.”

Kevin told the story of Florence, whose parents didn’t recognise her after 10 years in the LRA. “She has a blank face, an emaciated body carrying burdens beyond her means and a sickness that won’t heal. The emotional scars she bears are beyond calculation. Parents gape at this care-worn adult who they’re told is the little girl they’ve been looking for all these years.”

World Vision was trying to help the former child soldiers with an adolescent training program for 5,000 boys to learn carpentry and motor mechanics, and tailoring and cooking courses for 3,000 girls.

Kevin said many of the women had been taken from their mothers before they could learn normal household routines. “The girls haven’t been trained for anything, domestic or in the workplace. Their self-esteem has been demolished and they sorely need loved ones. They want school. They lack skills to get jobs. They’ve been cheated out of all three. God, why did this happen?”

He said children who hadn’t been abducted coped little better than those who had. “Every family has been directly affected, few have eaten properly, learned to read or ever seen a nurse, let alone a doctor. Imagine your 16-year-old growing up here, going to sleep each night listening to gunfire instead of DVD music,” he said.

“If the requirements of rehabilitation appear overwhelming, the coping mechanisms of carers have been improving. When we began treatment of released child soldiers in 1999, training them for trades was a one-at-a-time process. Now there are off-the-shelf manuals for wannabe carpenters complete with tools, while would-be motor mechanics, tailors and plumbers have packaged, detailed local-language guides, equipment suitcases and experienced volunteer tradesmen to fast track them. Children aren’t being kidnapped anymore, so the flow of escaped and released children of war is

at last slowing.

“Money doesn’t patch up dying, tormented children. God does. Generosity just keeps the surviving boys and girls alive so that He can do it in this life.”

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CHILD SOLDIERS NO MORE

FORMER child soldiers Grace Arach and Paul Okwokene came to Australia as ambassadors for World Vision’s Child Rescue program to raise awareness about civil war, child abuse and human trafficking in developing countries.

They were both abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda when they were 12 years old.

Paul told Australians that he had tried to escape two weeks after he was captured by the LRA.

“When the LRA discovered my plan to escape, they beat me with sticks until I was bleeding from my mouth, nose and all over my body. I could hardly move,” he said. He ended up as a bodyguard for warlord Joseph Kony and finally managed to escape at the age of 16.

“I served as a child soldier in the rebel group for a number of years before a rocket-propelled grenade injured my leg in a battle,” he said. “While I was in hospital I heard that UNICEF was helping child soldiers move back to Uganda and so I escaped with 25 of my fellow men.”

Grace, who won the Ugandan Woman Achiever of the Year in 2009, remembered the time she spent as a child soldier with the LRA as a dark time in her life.

“During my time with the Lord’s Resistance Army, I was tortured ... forced to become the wife of a commander and enslaved to hard labour,” she said. She was given a gun heavier than herself and was forced to fight in many battles. In one of these battles, Grace was shot in the chest but miraculously survived and, with new determination, escaped.

“I did not give up and will never give up,” she said. “The old times are gone and a new one has come. I will see to it that no more war happens among my people as long as I live.”

The pair received rehabilitation after their escape from the LRA – Paul at a

United Nations-funded centre called GUSCO and Grace at World Vision's Children of War Rehabilitation Centre in Gulu, Uganda, where she stayed for several months receiving care and healing.

They now both live in Australia. Grace is studying a Bachelor of Social Work at the University of Sydney and works part time in mental health, and Paul is studying English and hopes to work with underprivileged youth.

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THE THREE CANDLES

DAW May was head of the rundown Pansetka primary school in the north-east of Myanmar.

The little raw brick school, with 120 children from different tribes in five surrounding villages, was derelict and rain was coming in the thatched roof.

Daw May asked the five villages to help repair the schoolhouse. But each village was in dispute with the other villages and refused to work together on the project.

"Every morning when the bell rang, the children studied their lessons under this discord," she wrote.

For 30 years, Daw May had prayed for a new school building. In 2001, she decided to rise at 5am every morning, light three candles and pray until they burnt out.

She received some aid from the Education Ministry but not enough to rebuild her school.

"I did not put the blame on God for that little amount and I carried on my prayers as before," she said.

She heard about World Vision's work but knew no-one from the organisation. She continued to pray.

One day a woman came to her door to ask for a drink of water. On the woman's t-shirt was a World Vision Australia logo.

Daw May told the World Vision worker of her prayers and her own vision for a new building. Then they prayed together.

Within two months, World Vision had built and furnished a new brick school for the village.

World Vision also convinced the five villages to work together to carry out

maintenance for the school.

“God listened and answered my prayer,” said the school teacher.

“I thank World Vision, which is helping us in the name of Jesus. And my task is to share with people about the three candles and the power of prayer.”

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TONY THE TREE WHISPERER

TONY Rinaudo was dispirited and exhausted when an epiphany struck on a back road in Niger. His eureka moment would transform a dry African desert into a lush landscape with 200 million trees.

“I had been in Niger for around two-and-a-half years,” he said.

“I’d inherited an ongoing project, which focused on raising trees in a central nursery and delivering them to the villages and I was very discouraged – it was not sustainable, expensive and impractical to think of reforesting such vast areas from a central nursery.

“Additionally, communities and individuals weren’t interested. This attitude and the adverse conditions [drought, heat, termites, goats, etcetera] resulted in very low survival rates of the trees.”

On one particularly discouraging day, Tony stopped his car for a while to reduce the air pressure on his tyres to get through the sandy terrain.

He had thought of giving up and going home to Australia. He had been praying for wisdom and for a breakthrough.

At this low point, he looked out over the desert and realised the solution was lying just beneath his feet.

“I walked over to one of the small bushes that dot the landscape,” he said.

“They had been there all along and I hadn’t thought much of them – they were seemingly useless, desert bushes. They never grew very tall because people were regularly slashing them to make their farms ‘clean’, or women were cutting them back in order to collect firewood.

“As soon as I got to the bush and recognised the leaves as being the same as those on some of the few remaining trees in the landscape – everything changed! I didn’t have to plant trees – there was a vast underground forest that simply needed some pruning and temporary protection.”

Tony knew that these tree stumps had the potential to flourish. It was a revelation that would eventually transform the lives of millions of people.

The small shrubs that still dotted the degraded agricultural landscapes around him were not shrubs at all, but in fact the sprouting root systems of felled trees. Through proper pruning and protection, these trees could grow back, and in turn support the entire ecosystem and increase food production.

Tony Rinaudo's solution was clever and simple.

Using a cheap cutting instrument, a machete, hatchet or even a cheap pocket knife, Tony taught the local farmers to cut all the side lateral growth of the heavily-pruned tree and use the coppiced timber for wood heating – but leaving one central stem on the plant to grow straight up.

The plant puts its remaining energy into this solitary trunk, enabling the plant to grow vertically rapidly.

Encouraging the farmers to keep their animals from nibbling the tree of six months enables the tree to rapidly put on height, well out of the range of the grazing animal.

This very simple process had a dramatic response on the African landscape.

This pruning technique, known as Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR), made a tremendous impact across swaths of West and East Africa. It is low cost, just requires some training, and it puts the power directly in the hands of farmers, who have also spread the word about its success.

Tony started promoting FMNR in Niger in 1983. Since then, 200 million new trees have grown on five million hectares of degraded farmland – that's more than half the size of Tasmania.

From this land, Nigerien farmers are now producing an additional 500,000 tonnes of cereals a year – enough to feed 2.5 million people.

Through FMNR, African and Asian farmers are dramatically improving their harvests and livestock productivity, and increasing their income. Families have more food on the table and hunger is just a memory. The risk of famine has reduced and child nutrition has improved. During the 2004 famine in Niger, farmers who had adopted FMNR did not require food handouts, as they were able to sell wood, graze their livestock on leaves

and eat the fruit and seeds of certain tree species.

FMNR has resulted in a 200-500 percent increase in milk production from cows in Kenya.

Initially, it was not easy to convince others of the benefits of FMNR.

“I was called the mad white farmer,” said Tony. “Many people didn’t like the idea of leaving trees on their land because it hadn’t been done that way before, or they believed that trees would negatively impact crop yield or they knew from experience that if they left trees, somebody else would likely steal them or, because of the policies at that time, even if they did leave them, they would not be allowed to harvest the trees.”

Gradually, the FMNR practice spread.

Tony has also been instrumental in introducing edible seeded Australian acacias into Nigerien farming systems and for their promotion as a human food.

FMNR has helped transform the lives of people like Aster and her husband Ergado in Ethiopia.

They used to cut down the trees on their land and fewer would grow back each year. When it rained, their land would turn into mud and stones would wash down from the hilltops. Their soil was becoming infertile – it would be a struggle to harvest even 200 kilograms of maize in a year.

Families in their community used to experience the terrible effects of hunger and starvation frequently.

“My family of seven did not get even one meal a day and usually went to bed hungry for more than six months of the year,” says Aster.

Desperate for another source of income, and pregnant with her youngest son, Aster would walk for eight hours to a nearby town to visit the flour mill or sell sacks of charcoal from the trees they had cut down.

In 2006, World Vision Ethiopia and the World Bank collaborated with the local community and the regional government to help combat the environmental crisis and assist families to improve their livelihood. Farmers were supported to form cooperatives, which invest into projects that would benefit them all.

Degraded land was restored using FMNR techniques.

The return of trees and vegetation to farmland has helped to stop soil

erosion. The fertility of farmland has recovered – and for families like Aster's, this means their food and income are secure. Their land produces more food, trees are pruned instead of cut down to provide firewood and grass from the land can be cut and used for cattle feed.

Aster's land now produces almost 10 times as much maize as before and she has been able to invest in other crops.

"I have been able to grow different fruits and edible plants such as mangoes, papayas, sugarcane, cassava and others, both for my family's consumption and for sale. I have also bought two cows, which gave birth to two calves each. These cows are giving me and my family four litres of milk per day," Aster said.

Aster no longer has to carry heavy loads into town. The cooperative was able to build a flour mill in the centre of the village, just 500 metres from her house.

"I have enough food on the table every day and I sent all my children to school," says Aster.

The efforts of the community, the government and World Vision have transformed the bare eroded hills into an ideal tourist attraction in the area. The forest has become home for monkeys, hyenas, wild pigs, leopards, gazelles, hares and varieties of birds.

As natural resource management advisor for World Vision Australia, Tony gives advice to various nations on food security, environmental issues such as land degradation and reforestation.

"The most remarkable thing that I see is the deep joy on people's faces," he said. "People who were beaten down and who felt like hopeless victims of climate change and poverty, people whose backs were against the wall and who did not know which way to turn in order to get out of their difficult situations, within the short space of two to three years of practising FMNR, now had hope and were confident to face the future.

"They have dignity – being able to provide for their families. To a great measure, they are more resilient to environmental shocks and uncertainty as they have alternative income streams and the risk of farming is reduced."

HUGH Evans was in the slums of Manila at the age of 14 when his unquenchable passion for helping to serve the world's poor was ignited.

He was on a trip to the Philippines and living with a poor family in a tent on a slum built on a garbage dump called Smokey Mountain.

One of the family members was a teenager named Sonny Boy. He was the antithesis of everything Evans had experienced.

"I'd come from the leafy, eastern suburbs of Melbourne; his body was covered from head to toe in tattoos and he was about to become his gang's leader. He took me to his house and we cooked this meal together with some food that I'd brought with me. I didn't know what to expect," Evans recalled.

"When it came time to go to sleep, we literally cleared away the pots and pans on the ground. We lay down on this concrete slab, the size of half of my bedroom, with his whole family sleeping [with us]. We were lying on top of a garbage dump, with the smell of rubbish and cockroaches. I lay awake all night thinking, 'Man, what's the world like?' I was so deeply confronted by this reality."

It was a revelation that was to shape his destiny. The following year, he studied in India for six months and his resolve to help the world's poor was galvanised. Recalling his experience on his return to Australia, Hugh wrote in his memoir:

"The greatest injustice I witnessed this year happened, not when comparing the poor of India to the rich of India, but upon arriving home. I couldn't understand why we as Australians are so determined, even to the point of complaining, to get the latest mobile phone ... then comparing this to walking through the market of India and seeing a man with no legs, simply a piece of rubber tied to his waist to stop the skin on his pelvis from scraping away ... all he asks for is the equivalent of 20 cents."

Hugh then spent a year in South Africa as World Vision's inaugural youth ambassador. During that trip, he implemented much-needed building projects while working at a foster care centre for children orphaned by HIV and AIDS and violence. Returning to Australia in 2003, he co-founded the Oaktree Foundation, Australia's first youth-run aid organisation with a mission of "young people working together to end global poverty".

In 2004, he was named Young Australian of the Year and in 2005 was

named by the Junior Chamber International as one of 12 Outstanding Young People of the World for his humanitarian work.

Hugh was one of the first people on the ground in Banda Aceh in Indonesia after the Boxing Day tsunami struck in 2004, and one of the leaders behind the Make Poverty History concert in Melbourne that helped win a commitment from then Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's government to increase Australia's foreign aid budget.

"I think we are sick and tired of things that are tokenistic," he said. "We need to do things that will tangibly make a difference."

Now he is the founder and CEO of the New York-based Global Poverty Project, a community education group that aims to increase awareness of extreme poverty.

Hugh, who became a Christian at 13, first supported World Vision after the organisation sent a speaker to his school to talk about the 40 Hour Famine. He said the World Vision woman talked with great conviction and he couldn't help but get involved.

He signed up for the 40 Hour Famine and pledged to personally raise $500. He did. And the next year he pledged to raise $1,000 and did that too.

Soon after, he became an organiser for his school for the event. His school became the highest fundraising school in Victoria.

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THE IMPOSSIBLE JUST TAKES TIME

AS Walt Disney once said: "It's kind of fun to do the impossible. Every noble work at first seems impossible. It just requires willing hearts."

On the island of Flores, Indonesia, 11 local villages, World Vision Australia and AusAID (the Australian Agency for International Development, now integrated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) worked together to achieve an "impossible" engineering feat to pipe in clean spring water from high up on a mountainside.

Before the impossible became possible, women had to walk long distances for up to an hour through a forest to collect water in buckets. Sometimes they got to the well and it was dry. Often they had to spend a lot of time waiting their turn to draw the water up from the well.

One bucket might only hold 10 litres and so they had to make five or six trips in a day, carrying buckets on their heads to collect enough water for all their daily needs – to wash clothes, dishes, bathe, drink and cook.

Research found that only five percent of women on the island were less than 30 minutes away from a safe water source.

A villager named Wilhelm said the water from the well was often dirty and caused sickness among the children.

“A lot of time was spent collecting water, and there was not enough for our needs,” he said. “It was also bad for our health.

“So we talked with World Vision to work with us and the other villages along the coast to improve our access to clean water.”

The community leaders knew of a natural spring near the village of Hewa – 27 kilometres away and on the side of the volcano, Mt Lewotobi. The Hewa villagers agreed to share their water and even held a feast to mark the start of the pipeline project.

World Vision helped to bring the villages together to support and facilitate the project. Then, every day, the villages provided 50 to 60 workers to construct the pipeline.

With funding and advice from World Vision Australia, an engineer was hired to make sure it was possible. Gravity would force the water along the pipeline and involve low running costs.

The construction took 16 months to complete. There were two villages who did not want to be involved in the project. They didn’t think it could be done. They thought it was impossible for the water to run the 27 kilometres from the mountain to their village. They said it would happen when “the cats have horns” or “when pigs might fly”. But when they saw the water running to other villages, they wanted to be included too.

The villagers then formed a water management committee to maintain the pipeline and ensure that leaks and faulty taps were repaired.

Anastasia, a mother from Flores, spoke of the miracle. “Now we find it easy to do the laundry, the washing and cooking. Also in the yards we can water plants and grow small gardens close to our homes. We take baths at any time, but we used to have only one a week. Now we have more time each day to meet with mothers and look after the children. Teachers and healthcare workers are now more willing to come and work in our villages

because we have water. This has helped to improve our education and health too."

Another economic benefit to the access to water has been the growth of a brick-making industry and improved housing. The dirt is mixed with water and then placed into brick moulds before being put out in the sun to dry.

When they have a few hundred bricks, they are placed in a kiln to bake hard. One family business now makes 600 bricks per day. Before, they could only make 15 bricks per day. The bricks are used to build houses in the villages, and the government buys bricks from the local makers when they are building schools or health centres.

Today there are 30 brick producers in the area.

"About 6,000 people in the villages get the benefits from this water project, and all the people are very grateful to World Vision and AusAID for their support," said Flores villager Michael. "We are so thankful because, since our ancestors, we never received the benefits of fresh water. No words can describe our happiness."

Today, 95 percent of the population are less than 30 minutes from a safe water source and the incidence of diarrhoea has been slashed from 38 percent to less than 10 percent.

Since 2009, World Vision Australia has managed 114 water, sanitation and hygiene projects across 35 countries, with an investment of more than $50 million.

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THE HEART OF HUGH JACKMAN

HUGH Jackman was sponsoring a child with World Vision at the age of eight. He participated in the 40 Hour Famine as soon as his father said he was old enough to do so.

"My older brothers and sisters used to do the 40 Hour Famine and I remember, being the youngest, that I couldn't wait to do the same," said the acclaimed Australian actor.

"I remember doing that for a number of years with friends from school and church, so I've pretty much been involved with World Vision for 40 years."

His wife, Deborra-Lee Furness, was also an early World Vision supporter.

“We had always seen the work they’d done,” she said. “When our son was a little boy, he used to watch the World Vision ads and he was the one who inspired me. He took the water out of the fridge one day and put it in a little trolley and said, ‘I’m going to Africa because they have dirty water.’ He’d seen that on the World Vision ad.

“In Australia, World Vision reached out to us and we reached out to them and so began a beautiful relationship.”

That relationship saw Hugh and Deborra-Lee throw their considerable celebrity weight behind World Vision’s work and their appointment as World Vision Australia ambassadors.

The turning point was a meeting between Hugh, Deborra-Lee and Tim Costello in 2007.

“Hugh said he and Deb wanted to understand poverty,” said Tim. “Their profound sense of wanting to understand really won me.”

“As soon as Tim Costello reached out to us and had a talk to us it just seemed like a no-brainer to Deb and [me],” said Hugh. “We were really passionate about the work they did around the world and it was just a perfect fit.”

The three travelled together to Cambodia the following year, without a camera crew.

“Cambodia was challenging and eye-opening and also incredibly inspiring because I think that’s when I first understood the concept of a ‘hand up’ rather than a ‘hand out’,” said Hugh.

“Of all aspects of World Vision’s work, it seems to be one of the guiding phrases or mantras. Out there in the field with Tim, we were at a ceremony where five women were getting a $500 loan to start their business. To see the tears running down their faces was incredible because what that represented was not just a chance for them but actually the first time in the history of their families that they had a chance to break out of that cycle of poverty. It was very powerful and meaningful.

“I love the holistic approach that World Vision has, actually making a massive difference, not only raising up a society but making it sustainable.”

In 2009, Hugh, Deborra-Lee, Tim and a World Vision team visited Ethiopia. It was to prove another massive turning point.

Here they met a poor coffee farmer named Dukale, who would prove to

make such an impression on the Aussie star that he launched his own fair-trade coffee company back in New York City.

Hugh is an admirer of the work of Nobel Laureate economist Muhammad Yunus, who pioneered micro financing.

Yunus had observed, “In my experience, poor people are the world’s greatest entrepreneurs. Every day, they must innovate in order to survive. They remain poor because they do not have the opportunities to turn their creativity into sustainable income.”

That observation rang true to Hugh.

“Some people in the world have this perception that poverty is something you can overcome if you work hard enough. I spent a day with Dukale in the field in Ethiopia, where they work seven days a week 10 hours a day. He had five kids and a sixth on the way. No one could have worked harder. I’d never worked as hard as Dukale.

“Rising out of poverty is not down to hard work, it’s down to opportunities. If you don’t have proper sanitation or water, or health or education, you can’t rise. World Vision gives the opportunity to people who are already working at their breaking point to break the cycle of poverty.”

Their shared passion for social justice has made Hugh and Deborra-Lee persuasive World Vision advocates.

“We do everything together; we’re a team,” said Hugh. “We both come from largely single-parent families who were working and giving back in an extraordinary level and looking after kids.

“As busy as we seem to be, we’re not half as busy as they were. We were brought up in a world where, no matter how busy you are, the sense of giving back or being of service is part of everyday life. So it feels natural to us. We just feel really blessed that we have the opportunity to work with World Vision.”

Both Hugh and Deborra-Lee believe that extreme poverty could be eliminated in their lifetimes.

“There’s not a person on the planet who doesn’t want to see an end to extreme poverty,” said Hugh. “Extreme poverty is not a natural state. It doesn’t have to be the case and it’s down to our management and attention and care really. If we start to broaden our own personal circle to share the realities of life, we can solve extreme poverty in our lifetime.

“Sometimes it seems overwhelming and you think, ‘What can I do?’ World Vision’s given a really simple way, by sponsoring a child.

“One of the things I’m most impressed about World Vision is that they make it simple to engage in this seemingly overwhelming area.”

“The more awareness there is of poverty, the more we can make the shift to fighting it,” said Deborra-Lee. “You start with awareness and then you get people to step up and want to help out. I want everyone in the world to make a difference. I want them to know that the smallest action can make a difference.”

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A PROMISE IS KEPT

THE two men could hardly have been any different. One was a poor coffee farmer from the Yirgacheffe region in Ethiopia; the other a Hollywood legend.

They couldn’t understand each other’s language and led vastly different lives, yet they bonded almost immediately.

The film star, Hugh Jackman, thought the poor farmer, Dukale, was “one of the happiest people I have ever met; full of joy, full of optimism”. He was deeply impressed by the farmer’s strength and dignity.

Dukale worked 10 to 12 hours a day, seven days a week on his 800-tree farm, to barely make ends meet and care for his family. He lacked access to markets that could offer a fair price for his product.

His family spent their days gathering firewood, making it impossible for his children to go to school, or for his wife to pursue her business goals. Despite overwhelming obstacles, Dukale supported his family and produced high quality organic coffee.

Hugh, a confessed “coffee snob”, tried Dukale’s coffee – he takes it strong and black – and said it was the best he had ever tasted. Dukale made it clear that he did not want to subsist on the generosity of others. He wanted to realise the fruits of his own labour.

The *Wolverine* and *X-Men* star, in Ethiopia as a World Vision Australia ambassador, promised to somehow help Dukale and his community.

When Hugh arrived home from his life-changing trip to Ethiopia, he spoke

at the United Nations as a World Vision ambassador about fair compensation for farmers like Dukale.

Fair trade product workers get a fair price, the way farmers treat the soil is protected, no child labour is used and farmers' families receive an education.

Hugh then co-founded the free-trade coffee company, Laughing Man Worldwide, with Dukale.

Laughing Man buys fair trade coffee and tea from co-ops, including Dukale's, and sells the products from their two Manhattan-based cafes.

All profits go to education, community development and new business development in the developing world.

As Hugh put it, he and Dukale were not starting a charity. They were going into the coffee business. It was a labour of love.

World Vision partnered with Dukale to construct a methane gas system that converts cow manure into lamplight and cooking flame. His family no longer spends their days collecting firewood. Dukale has increased production on his farm, hired more local workers, and re-invested his profits to buy more land. His children are in school, his wife owns a small shop in the village, and he's teaching his fellow farmers cutting-edge agricultural techniques.

Dukale has purchased a cafe, and his oldest son, Elias, is on track to be the first in the family to graduate from high school

The unique friendship between Hugh and Dukale is the subject of the documentary film, *Dukale's Dream*. It follows the six-year journey since the extraordinary trip to Ethiopia.

The film premiered in New York and had an instant impact.

"Some hardened New Yorkers were moved to tears after seeing it," said Hugh's wife and co-social justice activist Deborra-Lee Furness.

"After the first screening in New York, people came back and really wanted to get involved. That's what's so great when you do something like this because people really get to see the big picture. They get to see what it's actually like and it inspires them. So many people have stepped up and want to become involved after seeing the film."

Hugh and Deborra-Lee plan to return soon to Ethiopia to see Dukale and his coffee bean trees, two of which he named after the celebrity couple's

children, Oscar and Ava.

“Dukale is a man who has transformed his life,” said Hugh. “He is a good friend for life.”

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GIVING VOICE TO THE POOR

LATIN American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez said there was no true commitment to solidarity with the poor if one saw them merely as people passively waiting for help.

Respecting their status as those who control their own destiny was an indispensable condition for genuine solidarity, he said.

“For that reason, the goal is not to become, except in cases of extreme urgency or short duration, the voice of the voiceless, as is sometimes said – undoubtedly with the best of intentions – but rather in some way to help ensure that those without a voice find one.”

The truth of that has become apparent to thousands of people, including a group of pregnant women in Uganda, frightened parents in Brazil, villagers in Zambia, and HIV-positive activists in India.

They were all empowered to make positive and powerful differences in their community through World Vision’s Citizen Voice and Action program.

Since 2005, Citizen Voice and Action has been educating citizens in more than 1,000 communities about their rights and equipping them with a structured set of tools designed to empower them to protect and enforce those rights.

The Citizen Voice and Action program is a long-term global initiative which seeks to empower marginalised citizens, including children, to have a voice in how essential services (especially health and education) operate and to allow them to exact accountability from public authorities.

The program was built on work that has been done by social movements around the world and adapted and structured by a team led by World Vision Australia’s Bill Walker.

“Citizen Voice and Action came out of a lot of experimentation across Latin America, then southern Asia and Africa, and is now operating in 43 countries,” he said. “It spread like wildfire.”

Under the Citizen Voice and Action program, communities first learn about basic human rights, and how these rights are articulated under local laws. Next, communities work collaboratively with government and service providers to compare reality against the government's own commitments. Communities also have the opportunity to rate government performance against subjective criteria that they themselves generate. Finally, communities work with other stakeholders to influence decision makers to improve services, using a simple set of advocacy tools.

It has had some remarkable successes.

In an urban community in Brazil, an average of three children a week were murdered by drug dealers to intimidate people who owed them money. With the help of a local pastor and the Citizen Voice and Action program, the community worked together and stood up as a group to stop the killings.

In the Kyankwanzi district in central Uganda, where one in every 19 children die before their first birthday, a community used Citizen Voice and Action to have a local health centre staffed by a midwife and, in the process, strongly influenced a national rethink on the Ugandan health budget and stimulated the hiring of 6,170 health workers across the nation.

In Salvador, Brazil, youth built alliances with a head teacher and a city councilwoman, used score cards and social audits to collect information about school performance, and challenged a local school board to bring a dilapidated school into compliance with government standards. The school, whose walls delivered electric shocks to students on rainy days, is now the pride of the community.

In Keembe, Zambia, villagers and schoolteachers used social audits to systematically document the lack of teachers for a reformist district education officer. The school had only nine teachers and 10 desks for 820 students. After a series of meetings, the education officer successfully pressed colleagues in the district to post five additional teachers and deliver 35 desks to Keembe.

In a poor neighbourhood in Delhi, India, a community used Citizen Voice and Action to improve health services for HIV-positive patients and to fight discrimination by medical centres.

Bill Walker described Citizen Voice and Action as "a way that respects people's culture that lets them set the agenda, and generate knowledge,

take action and change policy which is often failing in implementation and when policy is poor".

"It gives people a voice, a choice and control. It's about accountability between citizens as well as accountability between people and governments.

"We piloted it in Brazil and Uganda and had very different results, which were a clue to how it would work out. We looked at a whole set of parameters that had to do with the freedom people had to express their voice to some degree.

"When we went to do the workshop in an urban community in Brazil in August 2005, we had asked the World Vision staff to choose a health centre and school. But parents had burnt the school down in the past week. This was civic action Brazilian style. Without any consultation, the government had decided to move the school, which had been within walking distance of the parents some kilometres away, and not provide a bus. So the parents burnt the school down as a form of protest and to get some action.

"At the health centre, we had the other side of the coin. We did workshops and it was very energetic. The community came up with an action plan and ran a radio program publicising the shocking state of this health facility. They had a group that camped outside the offices of the district health officer. They got quite significant changes of policy.

"In Uganda where the conditions were a lot worse, the chosen school and health centre were in an appalling state.

"One of things they came up with at a school in rural Uganda was the need to retain their staff. They had found that a lot of teachers in rural locations would try to get a job closer to a town or city, where the accommodation was better. The community recognised this and said, 'Let's try to build houses for the school. The community will fire the bricks for the house and do some building.'"

In more than 100 primary schools and more than 50 health clinics in 20 government districts across Uganda, World Vision has facilitated community dialogue, advocacy and monitoring of government service provision standards to improve access to and quality and accountability of education, health and water services.

Citizen Voice and Action has resulted in statistically significant reductions in student and teacher absenteeism and improvements in student test scores. It has also made important contributions to increasing student enrolments – including cases where student numbers have doubled, tripled and more than quadrupled in only two years.

Improved student-teacher ratios and increased access to nutritious food at schools have had a significant impact on academic performance. Several schools have reported their best academic results ever.

Citizen Voice and Action has also enhanced relationships between healthcare staff and patients, leading to increased health-seeking behaviour, higher outpatient numbers, and more women giving birth at clinics and using antenatal services.

In one primary school in Uganda, only one student in a class of 23 students passed the important final year exam that allowed students to progress to high school. Just one year later, after the community implemented Citizen Voice and Action, 27 students sat and passed their final year exams. In another school, Citizen Voice and Action helped the community to replace two teachers who were drinking instead of attending classes, and reduced teacher absenteeism.

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AN ADVOCATE SPEAKS OUT

EDGLEISON is a young man determined to change the world with the help of World Vision.

A passionate advocate for child rights, he leads a World Vision youth advocacy network in Brazil that is campaigning for legal reform to address violence and crime. It's a social justice issue that affects many Brazilian youth.

And it's an issue that is close to his heart.

He was born in the notorious Fortaleza area, the fifth largest city in Brazil and one of the most dangerous places on Earth. It is a city of glaring inequality with a high violence and murder rate. About 130,000 of its residents live in extreme poverty. A third of inhabitants live without sanitation and there is a dire lack of adequate housing.

Growing up in Fortaleza, Edgleison's neighbourhood was marred by

violence and crime. His community struggled to protect children from sexual exploitation and child labour. It was not a safe place to grow up.

But through the support of World Vision's Citizen and Voice and Action program and Australian child sponsors, Edgleison's community learnt how to create a safer neighbourhood. It meant that kids like Edgleison were given the chance to thrive.

"I was part of a children's club that had weekly activities where I would learn about child rights," he said.

"If I didn't get involved with the activities, I could have been part of the bad statistics about youth mortality or criminality. Because of World Vision, I had the opportunity to learn a lot of things and to grow up in a safer space.

"I think my community is totally different from what it was before, because today the community understands that children and youth have rights. World Vision fights against issues of child labour and sexual exploitation, so in the end the community is a better place for children and youth."

Edgleison says he is grateful for the support of Australian child sponsors. "My city is a better place because of them. The children are safe, even inside a very poor community, a very violent community."

Edgleison has made the most of his opportunities and is studying social science at university, as well as leading the youth advocacy campaign. He wants to ensure other Brazilian children and youth have the same opportunities he had.

And he wants to harness the power of young people to raise their voices and drive social change.

"I want to keep doing this work, showing the youth that they're capable and they can change the world," he said.

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A DECADE OF EMERGENCIES

NATURAL disasters and emergencies can devastate entire communities, and the speed of a response can be – literally – a matter of life and death.

In the first years of the new millennium, World Vision Australia responded quickly to a string of natural disasters.

In October 2005, a powerful earthquake hit the Pakistani province of

Kashmir, registering 7.6 on the Richter scale. Three million people were left homeless, while 75,000 lives were tragically lost.

Australians showed tremendous generosity, donating $2.2 million towards World Vision's relief efforts to deliver life-saving aid in the form of food, clean water, blankets and winterised tents, as well as assisting with long-term resettlement and rehabilitation.

Civil unrest erupted in East Timor in March 2006, leading to the displacement of over 130,000 children and families.

Once again, World Vision responded by providing much-needed food, shelter and medical care to displaced families. With the help of generous Australians, World Vision has continued to work in the area, establishing projects to help improve long-term food security and child protection as well as running livelihood security and peace-building activities.

The Indonesian city of Yogyakarta was hit by an earthquake in May 2006, measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale, and claiming the lives of more than 5,000 residents, leaving 38,000 injured and 1.5 million homeless. World Vision assisted survivors, providing tarpaulins, blankets, clothing and high-energy biscuits. With the help of Australians donors, World Vision was also able to establish seven community health centres, providing much-needed medical support to children and families.

In the same year, a month-long military conflict in Lebanon, Israel and the Gaza strip killed over 1,500 people and left millions homeless. World Vision partnered with Red Cross Lebanon and United Nations agencies to deliver emergency food relief, medical supplies and shelter to about 45,000 children and families in Beirut and Lebanon.

World Vision stayed on after the conflict ended to help rebuild communities, establishing children's rights programs and peace-building initiatives.

In Mozambique, floods caused the Zambesi River to break its banks, putting surrounding areas underwater in February 2007. More than 250,000 people were affected, with up to 120,000 displaced. World Vision distributed food aid, water purification tablets, mosquito nets and tents. World Vision also helped communities get back on their feet during the resettlement period, establishing food-for-work programs in 22 resettlement areas.

Two months later, an earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale hit the

Solomon Islands provincial capital of Gizo – a tsunami and numerous aftershocks followed. With the help of Australian donors, World Vision provided urgent relief in the form of water tanks, tarpaulins, blankets, soap and cooking utensils. World Vision helped to assess damage and survivor needs, conducting health checks and setting up basic hygiene facilities.

A series of severe floods struck India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Bangladesh in August 2007. More than 3,000 children and families perished in the floods and a further 35 million were displaced. World Vision provided food and other essentials to 27,000 families in India, 17,000 in Bangladesh and 6,000 in Nepal. World Vision also assisted with long-term recovery, providing agricultural and livelihood support.

Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh claimed 3.000 lives, and left more than 40,000 injured and a further two million in need of urgent assistance in November 2007. Australian donors enabled World Vision to respond immediately, evacuating more than 20,000 people, distributing food, bedding, clothing and water and providing temporary shelter to over 65,000 children and families. World Vision stayed on to help establish long-term livelihood recovery programs.

A tropical cyclonic storm killed approximately 138,000 people in Myanmar in May 2008. It was the nation's most severe natural disaster. World Vision responded with essential relief supplies, supporting over 347,000 children and families by providing food, shelter, blankets, clothing, mosquito nets, cooking sets, water containers and hygiene and sanitation supplies.

EMMA Brusnahan and her family had only one destination in mind when they had saved up for their first overseas trip – Tanzania.

The East African nation, known for its vast wilderness areas, was home to their sponsored child, Christina. "As soon as we started writing to her I just wanted to meet her," said Emma. "Our children were the same. They loved writing her letters and receiving letters from her.

"We'd never been on an overseas holiday and we thought, 'Why not go to Tanzania?'"

The trip was to prove a blessed adventure for Emma, her husband Grant and children Kate, 15, Chloe, 13, and Jonas, six.

"We did a lot of reading about Tanzania and were dubious about the trouble we might get into but we had a wonderful holiday," said Emma.

“Everyone was so friendly and we made really good friends. It was wonderful to meet Christina. Her family did not speak English and they were from a totally different world to us but, then again, they were just like us. Christina’s mum was just like me in many ways and her dad was always joking and that reminded me of my dad.

“Our kids loved it too and they have talked about it ever since. They have remembered everyone’s names. They are now much more appreciative of what they have.

“I was particularly impressed by our son Jonas, who usually takes a while to warm up to people but, within five minutes of arriving at Christina’s house, he was outside kicking the footy with the village kids. It was such a great learning experience for our kids.

“We were so impressed by the work that World Vision is doing in the community. You can see that World Vision is making a real difference.”

The family was given two chickens by the villagers, which they donated to local World Vision staff.

Returning to Australia, the family held an African Day to raise money for Christina’s school. Emma asked her family and friends to donate goods to be sold and they filled her lounge room.

“Everyone was so generous. And, on the day, people really got into it and we sold everything. A newsagency nearby donated all their old stock and, in the end, we raised $3,055.”

The family is now saving to go back to Tanzania.

THE 2010s

Japan was devastated by an earthquake and tsunami. Osama Bin Laden was killed, Apple debuted the iPad, Julia Gillard toppled Kevin Rudd to become Prime Minister, led a hung parliament and was toppled by Kevin Rudd, who was then defeated by Tony Abbott, who was replaced by Malcolm Turnbull. Mary McKillop was canonised. World Vision focused on improving the sponsorship community development model, with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency. A common programming framework was rolled out for child wellbeing outcomes and objectives. Advocacy work in the field was refined and improved, focusing on child

rights, as well as influencing governments to enact policies that fight poverty and injustice.

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RESCUING THE TERRIFIED KIDS

IT is one of the world's most resource-rich nations. Yet the Democratic Republic of the Congo(DRC) – the 12th largest country on the planet – is plagued by grinding poverty, corruption and violent conflict.

About 6.3 million people in the DRC are food-insecure, and half of the children under five are chronically malnourished. Due to a string of civil wars, about 2.6 million people have become displaced and forced to flee from their homes.

Child exploitation is a major issue. Children are kidnapped and forced to fight as soldiers or to work as sex slaves. Also, according to the DRC Ministry of Gender, Family and Child Protection, at least 40 women are raped in the conflict-ridden country every day.

A World Vision study in 2014 found that one-third of children interviewed were afraid every day, while more than half were orphaned or separated from their parents, and a quarter lived without any adult support. More than a third described either witnessing or experiencing episodes of violence, at times extreme and graphic, in their lifetime

The stories children told World Vision researchers were often horrific.

"They came and were killing people with machetes," said Sifa, 13. "I saw them slit people's throats. I saw a neighbour have his two arms and toes cut off."

Mapendo, 16, said fear dictated how she lived. "I'm terrified of walking along roads because I don't want to be raped for the third time," she said.

The DRC has limitless water, from the world's second-largest river, a benign climate and rich soil with abundant deposits of copper, gold, diamonds, cobalt, uranium, coltan and oil.

But it is a nation of poor and shattered souls.

World Vision provides emergency food, healthcare, and other assistance to internally displaced people in the DRC. Rehabilitation centres help former child soldiers as well as women and girls who have been sexually exploited

regain confidence and dignity.

World Vision also operates child sponsorship programs, providing healthcare, education, child protection, economic development, spiritual nurture, water and sanitation.

Kayla Robertson, former media officer at World Vision Australia, was in the Democratic Republic of Congo on her 25th birthday at a centre for sexually abused girls and women who were being trained in simple skills to improve their lives.

“I interviewed one girl, no problem, and a second girl, no problem. Then I interviewed a third girl. I already knew that she was 16. When she was 12, rebels had come to her house and cut off the breast and outside of the vagina of her grandmother. They killed her parents and raped her and she ran into the forest and was raped again. Eventually she found a new community but, years later, the same thing happened again.

“I knew all of this and in the middle of the interview, I noticed she had a bit of glitter on her cheek. She had obviously been making a basket as part of her training in the morning and it just moved me.

“I thought, ‘She’s 16 and experiencing things no-one should experience,’ and there was something about this fleck of glitter.

“I had to force myself not to cry. I have never forgotten this girl.”

Kayla donated her birthday money to an orphan she met so she could afford to go to school for a year.

“In World Vision we constantly talk about the Qantas Club of life – where you are born in a certain area and you get to go through a certain queue and, if you are born in another part of the world, you don’t get to go through that queue,” she said. “You see these things and think they have the unlucky fortune to be born in that circumstance and if I’d been born in that circumstance that would have been me.

“I’ve interviewed so many people who are the same age as me and yet the experiences they’ve had are worlds apart. Just because they were born somewhere different.”

Photographer Meg Hansen came to a similar conclusion when travelling with World Vision in Senegal.

“There was this one 15-year-old girl we spoke to who had an 18-month-old baby who had malnutrition; I don’t know if she’d still be alive today because

nothing seemed to be working for her," said Meg.

"We asked her what her hopes and dreams were for her baby, because that's something that everyone in the Western world talks about, and she said, 'I just hope she lives until tomorrow.' As a mother over there, it's about survival, whereas here it's about lifestyle."

Meg, who has two sons about the same age as the mothers she was photographing, said: "You just think, 'wow'. It's just about where you turn up when you're born. That's fate."

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THE DEVIL'S WORK OR GOOD BUSINESS?

AID work is serious business. The best NGOs have a business-like approach to their work and are highly adaptive and innovative – they have to be.

Yet, there are those who think that marketing by a Christian-based organisation could be the devil's work.

"I encountered that at times and I always used to reply by saying that we think we are doing the most important business in the world," said former CEO Philip Hunt.

"If you can justify having effective business systems to produce chocolate or washing machines why would you not have effective business systems to improve the world, to save lives?

"Yes, we're a business and we're not shy about saying that because we want to be effective. And if BHP wants to be effective in getting stuff out of the ground, then nobody seems to complain. But some people seem to think we shouldn't be a business too.

"We operate like a business and we have good business systems. We run efficiently and effectively and that's because we think we are doing the most important work in the world. That's why World Vision is serious and professional. Because we think that saving lives happens to be important. We take it seriously. It would not be Christian, nor human, to do less."

World Vision Australia uses 81.4 percent of all money it raises for vital field programs and advocacy work overseas and in Australia. Another 13.7 percent goes towards fundraising and 4.9 percent to day-to-day

administration and accountability.

World Vision Australia has twice won the PricewaterhouseCoopers award for transparency in the past eight years. In 2015, it was named Australia's best run organisation in a national survey of not-for-profits and donors.

World Vision Australia aims to ensure that the highest proportion of its funds gets to those in need.

"We are very transparent and committed to the money getting there and making a difference," said Tim Costello.

World Vision Australia depends on the support of ordinary Australians for funding, with the majority of income coming from child sponsorship. Other funding avenues include emergency relief appeals, federal government grants, cash donations and the 40 Hour Famine.

"It could have been easy for us to develop income from government-based funding," said World Vision Australia board chairman George Savvides.

"If you go back to the past 15 years, it could have been easy for us to match every dollar of mum and dad sponsorships with the same amount from governments. But we struck a policy, and revisited it several times, to make sure government funding was to stay below 20 percent, because we didn't want to lose the ability to stand by our values, our voice, who we are, and our identity if we were in conflict with government on any issues.

"We didn't want to be muted because we were dependant materially on government as a source of funding. I look back and think how wise that was."

About 12 percent of World Vision Australia's funding currently comes from the Australian Government's overseas aid program.

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"I NEVER LOOKED BACK"

THE first person you encounter when you enter World Vision's Australian headquarters is Gene Byrne, the receptionist with an Irish lilt, a cheeky laugh and a gracious welcoming heart.

Dublin-born Gene joined World Vision as a temp about 12 years ago and instantly decided she never wanted to leave the place. She has been receptionist on the front desk for more than nine years. Gene is an amazing

asset – bright, efficient, engaged and engaging, and deeply passionate about World Vision's work.

"God led me here," she said. "Years ago, when I was working in the corporate world, I used to pass this building and say, 'I know I'm going to work there one day.' And I did. Don't ask me why I knew. I just did.

"I started to work at World Vision and never looked back. I've never had any inclination to leave. On my first day here, I knew I'd found my home."

Gene has greeted hundreds of visitors to World Vision's offices.

"You never know who is going to come in the door," she said. "It's like watching a movie sitting at my desk. If you sit here long enough, you'll see everything."

She recalled the memorable day an "ordinary looking man" came to the reception area to make a donation.

"He said he didn't want any fuss and then handed me a cheque for $10,000. He was such a humble man and he didn't want to make a big issue out of his donation. Then you have kids coming in with their money boxes to donate to the World Vision work. The generosity of people never ceases to amaze me.

"Working at World Vision keeps up your faith in people. There's horrible doom and gloom in newspapers. Then you come in here and you see the wonderful side of people.

"I love the volunteers who come into the mail room every morning. Some of them get up at five in the morning and they are not paid. They just want to help. I love to listen to them talk about their lives. There are so many beautiful stories in this place.

"There will be a time when I leave World Vision. But it will be retirement, not another job. It's a nice thing to love your job. I think I'll be happy working here until the fat lady sings."

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FASHION WITH A PASSION

EACH of the 128 Blue Illusion boutique stores in Australia and New Zealand sponsors a child through World Vision.

The boutique women's fashion retailer, owned by Donna and Danny Guest,

has been generously partnering with World Vision for many years to make a difference in the world.

The company's stated philosophy is to "be the change you want to see" by thinking globally yet acting locally. "Our ambition is to make a real difference regarding the happiness, health and wellbeing, family or career within communities across the world."

The Guests sponsored their first child in 1999 and, as their business grew, so did their beautiful mission with World Vision.

"We've got four kids of our own and the thought of supporting a child that wasn't getting the same support came to us," said Danny.

"As we went on growing the business, we thought it would be nice if we could sponsor a child with each store. So that's what we did.

"So we started off with one or two stores and it was fantastic. It's not a lot of money but the engagement of the staff and customers with the sponsorships has been really amazing.

"When you look at the passion and commitment our staff have in the business, it's great. They are really passionate about helping others and getting our customers on board as well."

Blue Illusion staff members feel part of the collective vision and share the letter writing duties to the sponsored children. Each boutique also works on a local level within the community organising World Vision fundraising events.

Donna was inspired to sponsor the first World Vision child when she was pregnant with her second child and watching a World Vision ad on TV.

"I remember being really distressed by it all," she said. "I thought, 'If I'm bringing a child into the world I'm going to try to save one.' I made the decision on the spot.

"We knew you can't just be successful yourself," she said. "There needs to be another purpose to it. We wanted a strong and profitable business but we thought we could do things that could help those less fortunate."

Donna said the beauty of sponsoring a child was "a tangible and colourful experience".

"I think we feel like we are accomplishing something great, to end poverty in an effective way," she said.

Blue Illusion's work has helped transform the lives of countless women and children around the world. Over many years, the Guests have supported fundraising activities in their retail stores, generously donating a percentage of sales to support economic development projects in Uganda and Cambodia, as well as contributing towards several emergency relief appeals.

Blue Illusion hosts national fundraising days in Australia and New Zealand to support the wonderful work of World Vision. Styling workshops are hosted and a percentage of sales from the day are donated to a World Vision project.

Blue Illusion raised $34,789 for World Vision to support women attending self-help development groups in north-west Delhi in India. These groups help women from the slums to gain the necessary social and technical skills needed to gain employment.

The company also raised $51,221 to improve maternal and child healthcare for mothers and young children in Battambang Province, Cambodia and $36,100 for World Vision's Typhoon Haiyan Appeal, following the devastating and deadliest Philippine typhoon recorded in modern history.

On a recent Mother's Day, Blue Illusion stores throughout Australia transformed into a visual celebration of women – with photos on display of women from around the world, including those who World Vision works with.

A special Mother's Day card – with all proceeds donated to World Vision – was sold at the stores.

"World Vision is a great organisation and they communicate so well that you can really see you are making a difference," said Danny. "This has become part of our business now. We have the three pillars of fashion, lifestyle and community. The community side is important because it means we are not just another soulless fashion chain. It's all about helping people when you can."

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A TALE OF BEAUTY

SUZY Sainovski, then working as a photographer with World Vision Australia, met four-year-old Beauty and her three-year-old sister, Belinda, on

a resource gathering trip to Zimbabwe in 2011.

They were in a desperate situation in the sole care of their 97-year-old great grandfather, Ameki, who was unwell and slept in their hut most of the day. The little sisters were forced to fend for themselves.

At just four years old, Beauty had become like a mother to her little sister Belinda. She fetched water and firewood, cooked meals and served them for her great grandfather and her sister. Before World Vision started distributing food in their area, the girls were surviving on just one meal a day.

In Zimbabwe, 1.3 million people depend on food aid for survival.

The sisters did not know where their father was and their mother had gone away.

Ameki had been taking care of the children since their birth. “They were born here,” he said. “They are very quiet children; they just play on their own. I am old and walk with a stick. It pains me so much that I cannot afford to help these children.

“Without the aid from World Vision, we would have died.”

When Suzy Sainovski first met Belinda and Beauty they wore little clothing and their noses were dirty.

“They looked up at us with big, curious and fearful eyes,” she said.

“I couldn’t photograph the girls with dirty noses so I cleaned them. They were instantly comfortable with me. They stood very still while I rested a hand on their heads and cleaned their noses. I wondered when someone last did this.

“I’ve been travelling to the field for almost five years. I’ve met children and families living on food aid in refugee camps, families whose drinking water comes from a dirty pond, a girl who narrowly escaped life in a brothel and a mother who lost her eight-year-old daughter to malaria. These stories have had a profound impact on me. But never has a story touched me as deeply as that of Beauty and Belinda.

“Beauty and Belinda jumped up and gripped onto us like little monkeys. How could we deny them? It broke my heart to think that maybe they hadn’t been held like this before. They were babies when their mother left and their great grandfather was frail and elderly.”

When she returned from the trip to Zimbabwe, Suzy burst into tears when giving a presentation about Beauty and Belinda's story.

Eighteen months after her visit, Suzy asked World Vision to see how Belinda and Beauty were faring. She was delighted to hear that they were alive and well and now living with their grandmother. Beauty is now in school.

Suzy went on to become World Vision's Syria crisis response communications director, and admits that, at times, working for World Vision has been "heartbreaking". But she said the work had given meaning to her life.

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BY THEIR FRUITS …

AUSTRALIAN blueberry farmer Ridley Bell was shattered when he visited a little health centre in northern Uganda in 2014.

The centre at Opeta was struggling to serve its community. It was without a maternity ward, without a medical lab, had no running water or electricity, no admission ward and no staff quarters.

Pregnant women walked for hours to the centre and had to give birth on wooden benches. Midwife Connie Apio often had to deliver babies at night by the light of a torch held in her mouth.

Ridley Bell, travelling with World Vision Australia CEO Tim Costello, observed the grim reality and said, "We've got to do something."

And he did. Through their family company, Mountain Blue Farms, Ridley and his wife Mieke donated more than $700,000 to upgrade the health centre and hire new staff.

In January 2015, Ridley and Mieke returned to Opeta as the new centre – now with a 22-bed maternity wing and housing for six nurses – was officially opened. The upgraded health centre serves 20,000 people.

Ridley Bell, a big, humble man who grew up in poverty in Melbourne, saw the fruits of his generosity and, in tears, said to Tim Costello: "Why wouldn't anyone who can, do this?"

Emotions ran high, as Ridley and Mieke embraced community members and leaders they had met the year before. The centre had been opened

only a week but had already delivered 18 babies. Midwife Connie Apio showed her newly-born son and announced she had named him after Ridley.

“When World Vision told us about the commitment Mr Ridley had made, we could not believe it at first,” said Connie. “It was too good to believe. First it would require constructing at least six new structures, connecting electricity, running water, staff houses; it was going to be too hard, we felt, for an outsider to do. But one year down the road, we have all these things.

“We have solar power, running water and some water reservoirs. We have an admission ward with 10 beds, we have a fully-equipped maternity ward fitted with equipment required at this level and we have eight staff quarters, 10 new toilets, a children’s admission ward, plus a splendid play area for children. We are now also able to provide anti-retroviral therapy to HIV-positive mothers.”

Moses Mukitale, one of World Vision Uganda’s staff members, said: “To imagine that a farmer in a First World country could actually dig deep into his hard earned money and fly with it to a Third World country for charity, is almost equal to impossible for me.”

Mountain Blue Farms is a leading supplier of blueberries around the world.

“We’ve been very fortunate to have a business that has achieved a lot,” said Ridley. “We’ve made money and just want to give it back to people who are less fortunate than we are and to provide opportunities for them to better themselves. I came from a very poor family and I know what it’s like to grow up without a lot of the things other kids had. I always feel comforted when I see lives of others transformed by what I give.”

Ridley and Mieke, through Mountain Blue Farms, have injected almost $1 million into World Vision projects in Uganda.

That includes sponsorship of an annual soccer tournament, bringing together teams from all four regions of Uganda.

“We have been challenged and blessed to be part of the health centre project,” said Mieke. “We fell in love with the people and the country and we have been very impressed with the World Vision staff.

“Africa wasn’t even on our radar. I remember when Tim Costello said, ‘Come to Uganda and see how we operate’. I remember the first day we saw a project and were so impressed with how World Vision operates. We

immediately felt very comfortable to partner with World Vision. That's how we came to be in Uganda.

"Our business is being blessed and we are Christians. God has a huge heart capacity for the poor and it's about recognising that, and being able to do something about that. We see God blessing us and so we are just a conduit to reach out to those for whom God cares very much.

"We certainly hope to continue to be involved in Uganda. We are looking at least a yearly trip there and the lovely thing for us as parents is that three of our four children have been and they have caught the vision that we have and they are supporting it through our business. We have a long-term commitment to Uganda and development work partnering with World Vision.

"Now we feel a close synergy to Uganda and a commitment to World Vision and the people there. I think we've been blessed and I thank God for getting us involved in Africa. It's our desire that people will be challenged and encouraged to see how things turn out.

"We are the conduit. I feel God blesses us and knows there's a need in Africa. It's His money and aren't we blessed to be the conduit? Two years ago, I didn't know we were going to Africa but God did."

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TRANSFORMED THROUGH SPONSORSHIP

ZAMBIAN-BORN Tresford's life was transformed when he was sponsored by Australian supporters of World Vision.

The inspiring young man was featured in a 2010 World Vision Christmas advertisement that showed how sponsorship can bring about long-term changes and give children born in poverty a chance for good health, clean water and an education.

Through the support of his Australian sponsors, Tresford has now finished school and wants to be a teacher. He has also trained as a counsellor for HIV and AIDS. He is working to support both his sister and brother to complete their education.

"World Vision has changed my life. It has transformed my village. My village has healthcare and clean water and I have had an education," Tresford said.

“When World Vision sponsors children, the money does so much in the community.

“My future is now in my hands. Other children are not so lucky.”

In the World Vision ad, Tresford travelled to a neighbouring community that had only been assisted by World Vision for a short time. Here Tresford met four-year-old Everlast.

Although his family was aware of harmful diseases, the lack of resources forced Everlast and his community to drink dirty water. In the video, Tresford was visibly shocked when Everlast’s father showed him the dirty unprotected pond which was the sole source of the family’s drinking water.

“Everlast has had malaria and he still gets diarrhoea. No human being should have to drink water like this,” Tresford said. Their nearest hospital is a 10 kilometre walk away.

World Vision is working in Everlast’s community and now the family has access to clean water. They have a brighter future.

“I would like to thank my Australian sponsors,” said Tresford. “I would like to encourage them that their money is still working. Child sponsorship has given me a future.”

World Vision has also changed the life of Precious, another Zambian child who lives with her parents and 10 brothers and sisters. It used to be her job to fetch her family’s water, but often that water made her ill.

The water was stagnant and dirty. Frequently, Precious suffered from diarrhoea, dysentery and stomach pains, and even malaria.

The simple act of digging a borehole, which was undertaken by World Vision’s Water Health Life program, has significantly improved life for Precious and her entire community.

Precious’ father Christopher said: “When Precious was sick, we would have to take her to the medical clinic every few weeks for medicine and a check-up. There is a big change in Precious’ health since World Vision drilled the bore and she’s been able to drink clean water.”

The new water pump is less than 50 metres away from Precious’ home. “Sometimes I was too sick to go to school,” Precious said. “Now I am happy to just walk a short distance and the water is clean. I have more energy to play now.”

Precious' father recognises that his is not the only family to benefit from the digging of the borehole.

"Other families in the community are also thankful that there is clean water nearby. Our children don't get sick from dirty water now."

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SINGERS STRIKE A CHORD

WORLD Vision artists Merelyn and David Carter, who perform as contemporary country duo Carter & Carter, visited Lesotho in southern Africa to see World Vision's work in a group of isolated communities. It wasn't what they expected.

"It was filled with so much more hope than we imagined," said Merelyn.

"We saw the poverty, we saw the hardship, we got to know some locals and heard their stories. There is no doubt that life is hard for these people – feeding themselves and their families is never assured, the lack of infrastructure to sustain their communities is appalling and the lack of health facilities is scary.

"But what we saw overriding all of these hard things was an overwhelming sense of spirit, independence, dignity, hope for the future and a gratitude that had them being thankful for the one meal a day they got, not whining over the two they didn't.

"We were definitely challenged, but more so when we got back to Australia. We live in the 'lucky country' and we certainly are lucky, in that most of us don't only have access to one meal a day, most of us have the opportunity to work and most of us have a home. We also seem to have a sense of entitlement that leaves us discontent with what we do have and always wanting more. We didn't see that in Lesotho and they are better off for not having that attitude."

In Lesotho, David and Merelyn met their sponsored child, Kabelo. They also visited farms, health clinics and keyhole gardens where recycled water is channelled to raised garden beds.

Carter & Carter have been supporting World Vision for more than two decades. They are passionate about fighting poverty and injustice in the world.

“David and I grew up sponsoring children with our respective families, so it was a natural decision to continue as we became independent adults,” said Merelyn.

“I got my first job at 16 and started my own sponsorship then, and apart from a year when I was a single mother and couldn’t keep up the sponsorship, I have basically sponsored children through World Vision all my life.

“When David and I were married, the sponsorships continued. I guess, at first, it was an automatic response to do something for those less lucky than us, but as I got older and thought about things more, I made the choice out of a sense of knowing my few dollars a month were making a significant difference, particularly through education, which is an important value of mine. To see the positive changes a few dollars and an education program through World Vision makes to whole communities was amazing. It gives us hope that we can make a difference.”

Carter & Carter came up with a creative idea to spread the World Vision message – a paper mâché pink piggy bank named Patty the Pig. The pig is handed around at Carter & Carter concerts and has raised more than $10,000 in funds for World Vision.

David and Merelyn are determined to continue their support for World Vision.

“World Vision has always been a priority for us,” said Merelyn. “We have faith in the structure, we see the results year after year, and we know that the world is a better place for its contribution. World Vision is making a difference – we have a shared value, so it is easy to advocate for it and be involved.

“We will keep educating ourselves on the causes of poverty and the ways we can be involved to facilitate change. We will keep challenging ourselves to be more grateful for what we have. We are only doing a little bit in the big scheme of things, but we do know our little bit makes a big difference and we are happy with that.”

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REBUILDING AN ISLAND NATION

ON 13 March 2015, Category Five Cyclone Pam slammed into the

southern islands of Vanuatu, affecting more than 166,000 people across 22 islands.

With winds of up to 320 kilometres per hour, it flattened homes, schools and whole villages. It was one of the worst cyclones the country had experienced. Twenty-four people were killed, and the cyclone directly affected more than 60 percent of the population and destroyed about 96 percent of the gardens and farms that the communities rely on for food. The damage caused by widespread flooding was exacerbated by climate change.

According to the United Nations' World Risk Index, Vanuatu is the world's most at-risk country for natural hazards, due to climate change, in particular more severe cyclones and greater variation between periods of drought and flood.

Before the cyclone actually hit, World Vision had relief items ready to go in the capital Port Vila and on Santo Island in the north, while on Tanna Island, the World Vision team had been able to pre-position water and essential food items for the expected immediate aftermath of the cyclone. The early intervention was crucial.

There were logistical difficulties for aid agencies because of the remoteness of some of the inhabited islands and unpredictable weather conditions.

Relief items distributed by World Vision included food, water, tarpaulins, blankets, hygiene items and kitchen kits.

In the small village of Isaka, the entire community had sheltered in a schoolroom.

"We fled our homes; we knew they weren't safe and went to the school, where we stayed for hours. All of the houses were destroyed," said villager Joanne.

"World Vision came to our village with food; rice, noodles and canned meals. Without it, we had nothing left to eat. We had some cassava but it got water damaged and was going rotten. But now our gardens are back again, we have vegetables to eat and some fruit too," said Joanne.

Donations from generous Australians enabled World Vision to provide life-saving emergency relief. World Vision also ensured that more than 6,300 children on the hard-hit island of Tanna received measles vaccinations to prevent an epidemic.

The small island nation has been able to replant gardens that were washed away – creating crops of nutritious island vegetables. People have rebuilt villages that were blown away, and made makeshift classrooms when schools were destroyed.

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ALAS POOR RUPERT

IT helps to have a sense of humour if you're an emergency aid worker in the midst of a crisis. Keith Lancaster, who was deployed to Tanna Island, Vanuatu in response to Cyclone Pam, has the left-of-field sense of the absurd that he revealed in emails sent to his family back in Australia.

"In the last couple of weeks, I've had a room-mate," he wrote from Vanuatu. "We got on fine at first but recently we started to have some issues. Rupert is a native of Tanna and we have had some communication difficulties. He doesn't speak English and I don't speak Bislama. We eventually gave up trying to communicate and just nodded as we passed in the night.

"Then I noticed someone had been tampering with some of my gear. Just small things at first but it started to irk me. My water bottle was damaged. Special treats someone had sent to me from Port Vila disappeared. Then my watch disappeared from my bedside table during the night. He claimed to know nothing about it but I'm reasonably confident Rupert was the culprit.

"The watch alarm was set for 0630 hours. If I was in the room at that time, I could hear it but couldn't pinpoint the location. How could he steal my watch and then have the gall to hide it in the room?

"The last straw was last night when I went to brush my teeth and noticed excrement in the basin. I told Rupert he had to go. He refused.

"I lost it and I poisoned him.

"I don't feel good about it. I'm supposed to be here to save lives and alleviate suffering but he overstepped the mark. The body is wedged behind the couch and I'll bury him in the garden tonight or early tomorrow when no-one is looking. I don't think anyone will miss him.

"Then, to make matters worse, it rained heavily last night and I was woken up by water dripping onto my head and back. Why do all the bad things

happen to me?"

A day later, Keith reported: "Rumours of Rupert's death may have been somewhat exaggerated. On my return from work on Friday evening, I began burial proceedings for Rupert. With plastic bag in hand and, having taken a deep breath, I pulled the couch away from the wall expecting to find the decaying body of my former roommate.

"On the Thursday night I had placed two cakes of poison in my room. On the Friday morning, both cakes had disappeared. I assumed, incorrectly, that he had eaten the bait and gone to join the choir invisible.

"There was something small, black and curly lying on the floor but it wasn't Rupert. It was my long lost watch; or what remained of it.

"There was no sign of Rupert. I was somewhat relieved. Perhaps I didn't have his death on my hands after all?

"I washed the watch and lay down for a few minutes before dinner. Rupert ran across the floor, paused to give me a cheeky grin, then dashed behind the couch. I jumped up, threw the door open and gave the couch a few swift kicks. He ran up the wall, across the beams supporting the roof and disappeared from view. Dirty rat.

"Since then, the staff at the lodge have done their best to evict this non-paying guest. One girl said she had chased him from the bungalow, found the hole he was using and blocked it up leaving him outside. He is a resourceful rat. He was back the next night and the one after that."

In April 2015, a powerful earthquake measuring 7.8 struck near Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal and was followed little more than two weeks later by a magnitude 7.3 quake.

Tens of thousands of people were killed or injured by both Nepal earthquakes. Millions more people lost their homes or livelihoods, or were affected by the destruction of crops and agriculture.

World Vision responded immediately after the Nepal earthquakes with airlifts containing tarps, blankets, jerry cans and tents. It set up more than 50 Child Friendly Spaces and temporary learning centres across the country to help protect children in the aftermath of the disaster.

World Vision has reached over 160,000 people in its response

after the Nepal earthquakes. Tens of thousands of relief items, including temporary shelter material, cooking supplies and solar lights, were distributed. World Vision also prioritised safe spaces for children, where over 10,000 children have benefited from learning activities, safe areas to play and psychosocial support in the aftermath of the disaster.

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MOVING MOUNTAINS IN NEPAL

AFTER many years working in crisis points in Pakistan, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, Lebanon, Japan, Haiti and Iraq for World Vision, Liz Satow decided to take a break from emergencies.

She came to Nepal for a slower pace of life, working in development. Then the big earthquake hit.

Liz, the director of World Vision Nepal, had kicked the winning goal in an indoor football match in Kathmandu shortly before the first deadly quake struck the nation.

“After the football match, I’d gone out for a coffee with a colleague when everything started rattling,” she said. “We ran outside and were thrown to the ground. Then we crawled into a crossroad and just sat there with all the aftershocks going on.

“We were a bunch of strangers sitting in the middle of the road and everyone was touching each other. Total strangers were holding hands. I’ve never been afraid physically but I actually started crying. It was a mix of things. I was thinking of the Haiti earthquake and the Japan tsunami. They were the images in my head when I was crying. I needed to cry for about 30 seconds and then went back to work.

“It took us a while to get going. We had trouble getting supplies in but, when we got started, we moved pretty quickly and I think we did a very good job. Nepal is an incredibly difficult place to work in because of the terrain, so to reach the most vulnerable was quite challenging.

“I’m so thankful to Australia. World Vision Australia sent us funding and sent some people who did a great job. Australia has always been generous wherever I’ve worked. They send people to the field who know what the

realities are."

Liz has worked with World Vision since 2001, starting in India and then moving to the West Bank and Gaza. In 2006, she joined the Global Rapid Response Team of World Vision and worked in large-scale responses in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

She said the reconstruction work in Nepal was "a long process". It would take the nation five to eight years to get back to where it was before the earthquakes.

"This earthquake took out a third of its economy," she said. "Imagine that happening in Australia. The long haul to rebuilding is where the real works begin. We couldn't do it without the donations from Australia.

"I would like Australians to know that Nepal is a lot more than just the mountains. It's stunningly beautiful. Nepal gets lost sometimes because it's between India and China. It's like a giant Asian sandwich and it's a little country.

"The people are very tough and resilient. In this mountain culture, they are used to being in a physically tough environment. These are people who walk across mountains to collect firewood and water.

"After the earthquakes, some of the communities that hadn't been reached by aid just got on with rebuilding. They looked after themselves."

In Nepal, school enrolment is high but a World Vision study of 16 areas where the organisation works found that at the age of 11, only 41 percent of children had functional literacy after years of attending school.

Most schoolrooms are bare of furniture and have heavy shutters and thick walls to keep out the cold but almost no light.

"Kids are straining to read and write," said Liz. "Some drop out of school because they just can't see. So solar lights are something we are working to introduce in schools.

"About 44 percent of children are malnourished. If you're malnourished in the first 1,000 days of life, your brain doesn't develop. In the long term, the impact on the country is huge. So we are working actively to fight malnutrition. It's working with families and communities to see what healthy options they can grow around them."

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

IT'S not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving.

In a simple and powerful act of kindness, homeless men and women in Melbourne donated $200 in one day to help the victims of the Nepal earthquakes.

Some of the givers were sleeping rough in cars. Some were boarding in houses or at caravan parks or couch surfing. Some were single mums with children, who were victims of domestic abuse.

When the hat went round at a homeless shelter and soup kitchen, they gave what they had to World Vision's Nepal appeal – 20 cents, a couple of gold coins and sometimes $5. Often it was the last cash they had in their pockets on that day.

"It's nice to know that you can do something for someone else, no matter what your circumstances are," said one of the donors at the homeless shelter.

"There is always something you can do; it could be the slightest thing. I've got it pretty good compared to other people. I have two hands, two good eyes, a nose, a mouth. We all forget the small things."

World Vision Australia's chief-of-staff Leigh Cameron said World Vision staff were overwhelmed when they heard of the generosity of people who had so little themselves. "We were so deeply moved by their giving," he said. "Out of crisis great things can happen."

When the leaders of the local Nepalese Association heard of the donations from the homeless, they offered to go to the shelter to cook for the men and women. They have now built an ongoing relationship with the shelter.

"That's the way the cycle of generosity and grace works," said Leigh. "It's a beautiful thing."

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VISION FROM THE MOUNTAIN

DAYS after the massive 25 April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, a young pregnant woman named Ganga felt an intense pain and realised she was going into labour.

She was on a mountaintop, several hours' drive from the nearest village,

with hundreds of others too afraid to go back to their homes that would surely collapse from the aftershocks.

As the world fell apart around her, Ganga was in labour for two full days. She wondered how she and her unborn child could possibly survive. It was against the odds.

A group of engineers finally came to the area to make damage assessments and called for an ambulance for Ganga. But there was no way a vehicle could climb to such a remote spot, especially with roads blocked by landslides.

Weak from pain and exhaustion, Ganga had to be carried on a stretcher down the mountain to reach a waiting ambulance.

“I thought I was going to die from the pain,” she said.

This story ends well. Ganga’s stretcher eventually reached the ambulance. She was driven down bumpy roads to the tiny village of Sindhuli, where doctors and nurses at the health post helped deliver her baby boy. But it was some time before Ganga could dare to hope that her child would survive.

“He didn’t cry for three hours – they thought he wasn’t alive,” she said. “Finally, he cried.”

World Vision workers provided Ganga and her children with emergency shelter and other supplies, carrying everything up the mountain when she returned home.

Ganga told them she would name her new child Vision, in honour of the role that World Vision had played in his short life.

World Vision Australia communications officer Matt Darvas saw many babies born out in the open as health centres struggled to cope with an influx of patients and dangerous aftershocks.

“Outside in the fields surrounding the hospital were hundreds of patients who were in the hospital when the earthquake hit. They were afraid to go inside with aftershocks continuing. Several women gave birth in the 30 degree sun outside on the grass.

“They were delivering their babies on yoga mats. It was a crazy scene.

“I saw one baby born right in front of me, an incredible testimony to the power of life amidst so much death and chaos.”

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A LONG WAY FROM HOME

WHAT inspires a young Aussie couple to pack up their lives and move to Nepal, one of the poorest and most remote areas on the globe?

It takes courage, faith and commitment. Nepal has some of the worst poverty indicators in the world, with nearly half of all Nepali children under the age of five malnourished. Nationwide, one in 20 children don't make it to their fifth birthday, and in remote areas this number is as high as one in eight. Education and issues of gender inequality mean that only 48 percent of women over the age of 15 can read and write.

Matt and Brittany Darvas moved to Nepal in 2013, he as a communications and development manager and Global One leader in Nepal for World Vision Australia and she to work for the International Nepal Fellowship.

They have endured earthquakes, bouts of giardia, 17-hour dangerous bus rides and rats that nibbled on their toes. They have witnessed abuses and desperate living conditions that are part of living in the developing world. They went to Nepal because they believed that's where they were meant to be.

It was on an exploratory World Vision trip to Nepal in 2009 that Matt met the little girl that changed the course of his life.

He was immediately drawn in by seven-year-old Sarita's mischievous grin. The little girl lived with her mother and seven older brothers in a small village perched precariously high along the side of a deep and winding valley.

The snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas served as a beautiful dissonant background for the daily struggles of Sarita and others in her village.

"When I first laid eyes on Sarita's village, I couldn't help but feel that if we had arrived 200 years ago, nothing before us would have looked out of place," said Matt. "There was no running water, electricity, mechanised farming or household equipment."

"The women still gathered on the soil-packed roofs to thresh out the wheat with long, smoothed sticks as they discussed the day's gossip and news. The situation of Sarita's family typified the knife-edge that so many families in Nepal's remote rural areas are living on."

When a drought destroyed the village's crops, Sarita's family was unable to find work. Her father had migrated to India to find work and had become desperately ill.

"I listened as Sarita's mother told us with tears in her eyes, that he had become sick, potentially too sick to ever return home, as he could not afford the medicine and the transportation required. I spent the day with Sarita, and what struck me most was that despite the difficult circumstances, Sarita was just like any other little girl I'd met in Australia; cheeky, playful and filled with her own hopes and dreams when it came to her future and what she imagined it would be like.

"Sarita told me that when she grew up, she would be a nurse. "Why?" I asked her. "So that I can help all the other little children in my village," she replied, with such self-assurance that you didn't dare to think otherwise. For me that was it.

"How could I go on living my life in Australia – which had been built on the opportunities I'd been lucky enough to be born into – knowing that children like Sarita, with such inspiring hopes and dreams for their communities and countries, might never be afforded the chance to realise their full potential."

Matt and Brittany's move to Nepal has seen them walk with the Nepalese communities through joy and heartache.

"You can't compare the brief visits any of us are lucky enough to take to Nepal, or any other country in the world, compared with living here and becoming part of the community," said Matt. "For me, living here has removed the ability to give simple answers to questions of poverty and justice and suffering in this world."

On the day of the first major earthquake in April 2015, Matt, Brittany and their new baby Zipporah were resting at home in Pokhara – a town only one hour's drive and 80 kilometres west of the epicentre.

"It was terrifying and it took us three or four hours to recognise the enormous scope of the quake," said Matt. He became one of the first responders to the crisis in some of the worst hit areas.

He travelled to crisis points, giving crucial information to World Vision staff and media outlets around the world.

"I was unsure whether I should leave the vicinity of my own family. Most humanitarian workers in a crisis like this are flying into the country secure

that their families are safe back home. There were still 20 or so aftershocks in the 24 hours after the first earthquake. So I was thinking, 'Am I an irresponsible father and husband leaving my wife's side?'"

Near the epicentre of the quake, Matt met Kumar, who had left his village of Singla in the Gorkha district days before the first earthquake.

Kumar had received a desperate phone call from his wife minutes after the quake. She told him their house had collapsed. "Come and rescue us," she had said. "The house collapsed, we ran outside, but the children are already hungry and our food is gone."

Kumar tried to gather as much information as he could from his village leaders. At that stage there were two confirmed deaths and 60 to 80 people, mostly children and women, trapped under fallen households, a further 20 people missing, no electricity, and their already meagre food supplies buried under the rubble.

And then he lost contact.

"When I met Kumar, he hadn't spoken to his wife in three days and was desperate," said Matt. "I said goodbye and thought I wouldn't see him again but that I would pray for him.

"That night, all the villagers were sleeping out in the field because they were afraid to go into buildings and someone showed me to a place where I could sleep and this guy Kumar was right beside me. I kept seeing him for the next three days and we became good friends."

For the next few days, Matt worked hard to share Kumar's story with the world via overseas networks such as the BBC and CNN.

Twice, helicopters were sent to his village but were unable to land. No-one was being rescued from that village.

In desperation, Kumar packed his bag and started trekking the 70 kilometres back to his village.

Before the quake hit, the journey would have taken four days. Now, because of multiple landslides, it would take at least seven days.

"Kumar was sending me Facebook updates on his journey as he travelled through one crushed village after another," said Matt.

"He finally got to his village and his house was just a pile of rock. But his family was ok."

Matt decided to personally fundraise to help finance the rebuilding of Kumar's house. He told his friend that it would be wise to help the whole community so suggested giving 75 percent of the money raised to Kumar and 25 percent to his community.

"Kumar said, 'No, give 50 percent to me and 50 percent to my community,'" said Matt.

"This remarkable man, such a great leader of his people, was focused on rebuilding his entire community."

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"I TRIED TO RETIRE"

WORLD Vision aid worker Judy-Leigh Moore says if anyone made an accurate action figure of her it would not be a Barbie, but more like a G.I. Jane. Her co-workers would surely agree.

In more than three decades with World Vision, mostly with the Global Rapid Response Team, this relentless grandmother has witnessed and experienced events and horrors that are beyond most people's imaginations in the harshest and poorest countries on the planet.

Her autobiography, *Where's Granny Been?*, reads like a great adventure yarn. In it she describes witnessing the aftermath of war and genocide in Rwanda, being shot at by snipers and narrowly avoiding landmines in Bosnia, of having a gun held to her head during a robbery in Mozambique, entering a war zone in Lebanon, of helping earthquake victims in Pakistan and Iran, aiding those affected by floods in Mozambique and famine in Sudan, directing the World Vision tsunami response in India and working amid the grinding poverty in Bangladesh, Zimbabwe and Albania.

She had planned to retire years ago. But recently she was again in the field, this time in cyclone-devastated Vanuatu before being deployed to Nepal after the April 2015 earthquakes.

"I tried to retire," she said from Nepal. "But whenever I would see a world crisis, like a tsunami, cyclone, flood etcetera I would just want to be there," she said.

"I tried cleaning people's houses and delivering junk mail, just to keep busy, but the humanitarian arena keeps pulling me back. Being able to do two or three deployments a year helps me realise that I still have a worthy part to

play in this life. I get time to spend with the family, but I can still follow my dreams for justice."

Judy's extraordinary journey began when she applied for a temporary clerk's job at World Vision Australia in the 1980s. After three days, she was offered a full-time job as a receptionist and later became personal assistant to the executive director.

Her interest in the humanitarian area grew as she listened to stories from the staff coming back from overseas trips and saw photos of how World Vision was helping people in underdeveloped countries.

Soon after, she was in the field and started her love affair with humanitarian aid work. It's a passion that has survived near-death experiences and horrendous working and living conditions.

"People think emergency aid work is so romantic," she said. "That all it is, is giving children hugs. They do not realise that you might be sleeping in a tent in a foot of snow, or eating rice and beans for weeks at a time without seeing any nutritious food. They forget about the mosquitoes and dirty water. They forget about the seven-day weeks and the 16-hour days. They forget you are without your family and the support of your friends."

Despite the often dirty, dangerous, and faith-challenging work, Judy's passion for making a difference is undiminished.

"Once in Pakistan, when I was travelling in a car, up a mountain, miles away from a town, I saw this old man who looked about 65 years old," she said. "He was walking on the crest of a hill, slowly taking one step in front of another. His back was bent, his head hung low. On his back he was carrying his old wife and all the possessions he owned. It was such a sad sight. I cried and vowed I would do everything in my power to change the world for people like that old man."

Sometimes, it's been the seemingly simple events that have been the most rewarding for her. One was seeing the smile of a 70-year-old man when World Vision connected his village to water. The man told Judy it would be the first time in his life that he would not have to walk five kilometres to the nearest stream and back for water.

In her book, Judy recounted another stark memory – the story of Rita, a Rwandan teenager with cerebral palsy, who was unable to run when soldiers attacked her neighbourhood during the 1994 genocide.

Rita's aunt was killed and the soldiers told the 15-year-old girl they would also kill her. Rita pleaded with the soldiers.

She was a cripple, she said. What danger was she to society, to the government, to the opposite ethnic side? The soldiers left her, but warned they would be back.

Rita survived in the rubble in the place she used to call home. Children would pass her and throw stones at her, calling her names. A woman carrying a Bible also stoned her. Rita started praying for that woman.

Eventually, the soldiers returned but instead of killing her, they picked her up and carried her to the Centre for Unaccompanied Children, which was funded by World Vision.

"When she arrived at the centre, Rita was very sick – malnourished, cut and bruised. And she was sad. Rita thought her whole family was dead," wrote Judy.

"The World Vision team started to investigate by taking a photo of Rita to the local administrative centre where someone recognised her and said her mother was still alive.

"World Vision found Rita's mother and sisters living only three kilometres from the World Vision office. We reunited mother, daughter and siblings. Tears flowed freely."

Judy has said that you need to be crazy or called upon by God to want to work in the field as an aid worker in an undeveloped or war-torn country.

"As a Christian of course I want to serve the poor, but it is more than that also," she said. "There are good people, without faith, who want to see justice for all. I think that, even if I did not have a strong personal faith, I would want to try to make life better for some poor lady or child.

"I have a keen sense of right and wrong. I dislike injustices with a passion. I believe in being an example to younger people. I want to work hard and make a difference."

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THE GIVING TAKES OFF

SINCE Jetstar and World Vision's partnership started in 2007, the airline and its high-flying customers have helped raise more than $7 million to

make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and communities.

Money raised through StarKids helps fund important projects in a number of Jetstar's destinations including Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

Customers can make a donation when booking flights online or by donating spare change to the StarKids ambassadors in-flight.

Jetstar staff fundraise weekly for StarKids through donation boxes around their offices and through raffles, morning teas, and even by running marathons.

Current projects include funding education for street kids in Myanmar, early childhood development in Australian Indigenous communities, sustainable business development in Cambodia, child health in Indonesia and child protection in Vietnam and Thailand.

Each month, Jetstar's inflight magazine profiles a different StarKids and World Vision project to share stories of hope and joy with passengers and crew.

In 2012, Jetstar team members travelled to Vietnam to see firsthand how StarKids donations were helping children in need, and in 2015 another passionate group of supporters from Jetstar, including the Jetstar Australia and New Zealand CEO, visited StarKids projects in Cambodia.

"We are immensely proud of Jetstar's charitable partnership with World Vision," said Jetstar CEO David Hall.

"It's a perfect union of the strengths of our organisations.

"Each year millions of passengers fly with us to enjoy new and exciting experiences away from home, and sometimes find themselves confronted by scenes of poverty and children in desperate need of support.

"StarKids provides our customers with the opportunity to give back to the communities they visit in many of the destinations we fly to across Asia, in Australia and New Zealand by donating their small change to make a big change.

"We know that tourism is important to underdeveloped countries particularly, and by drawing on World Vision's expertise through StarKids, we can help transform communities in a meaningful way beyond the benefit of tourism dollars we bring.

“In little over eight years our generous customers and passionate team members have raised more than $5 million to give children living in poverty access to health services, education and safe environments to grow up and thrive.

“StarKids has helped provide a brighter future for countless children already, and I look forward to the continued success of this life-changing partnership with World Vision.”

THE tagline of Alana Kaye’s emails is a quote she loves and tries to live by: “If everything you do, you do for yourself, then when you die it all disappears. If everything you do, you do for others, it all lives on.”

Alana, who is completing a degree in humanitarian work in Sydney, has volunteered with World Vision Australia since 2011 and has four sponsored children. She has already visited two, describing the meetings as “the best days of my life”.

Alana’s first trip was to visit nine-year-old Velinda in Marcala, Honduras, who she had sponsored for three years.

“Nothing will ever take away from the moment that I met Velinda,” she wrote soon after returning to Australia.

“Finally meeting someone in person that you have been writing to, conversing with, exchanging photos and updates with for years is an unbelievable feeling. I was so happy to meet her in person.

“The experience was unbelievable. Overall, the whole day really blew me away. I didn’t realise that by just sponsoring one child that it can have such an impact on the whole community.

“When I went to Honduras, I realised how life changing sponsorship was for her and for me.”

Alana was overwhelmed with World Vision’s organisation and attention to detail on the day and the way the organisation had involved the whole community in her visit.

“They had been planning my visit to Marcala for three months and had made every effort to make it an incredible experience for Velinda and [me]. The whole day was simply phenomenal,” she said.

After a three-hour drive from the capital city Tegucigalpa, Alana found Velinda waiting on the side of a road with a bunch of red flowers in her hand. “I ran to her and we hugged so tight,” said Alana.

Alana, Velinda and World Vision staff then visited four villages where children performed plays and songs for the visitors.

"The villages had so many presents to give – baskets of bananas, coffee, hand-woven bags with my name sewn on ... Just overwhelming[ly] sweet! The town doctor and town elders then did a thank you speech for coming to their villages and they each told me how World Vision had changed their community. I did a speech in each village to thank them for their overwhelming hospitality. In one village the local radio came to interview Velinda and [me] and a women's rights activist on the topic of 'Why I feel it is important to sponsor Velinda or a child in a faraway community'.

After visiting Honduras, Alana was so overwhelmed with World Vision's work and the impact it makes that she decided to sponsor another child named Fabiola, who lives on the island of La Gonâve, off the west coast of Haiti.

"Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and is known as the country the world has forgotten," she said.

"La Gonâve is known as the island that Haiti has forgotten."

"I didn't feel overwhelmed and, because I was travelling with World Vision, I felt confident. I really felt for the people of La Gonâve. I'm happy that World Vision is there."

The poverty on La Gonâve is overwhelming. The local people have profound struggles and, for them, the daily struggles mean life or death. Only five percent of the population have electricity.

"When I asked Fabiola what she would like to be when she grows up, she confidently said, 'An engineer in Australia,' so that she would be close to me.

"I then asked her younger sister the same question. Her sister's answer was: 'When I grow up, I just want to have the chance to have you as my sponsor, like Fabiola has had.'

"When I visited Fabiola's house, she ran inside to get her school book. She wanted to show me her absolutely beautiful handwriting and her grades. We went through the school book together and she was so happy with the excitement that I showed when I saw her grades.

"At the end of the day when I was leaving, Fabiola's mum and I were crying. Fabiola and I hugged goodbye and she whispered to me that she would

give the teddy bear I gave her to her sister because she wanted to share some of her happiness with her.

"I couldn't stop crying at this … I told her how beautiful she was for being so amazingly generous, kind and thoughtful to her little sister."

On her second day in La Gonâve, Alana visited her friend Ada's sponsored child Jwensly.

"Jwensly is a beautiful boy. He has a disability but has never seen a doctor. Last month, Ada amazingly organised (all the way from Cairns, Australia) for a wheelchair to be picked up and delivered from Port au Prince to Jwensly's house."

Ada also recently visited Haiti and met up with Alana's sponsored child Fabiola.

"I know you can't help everyone but through World Vision you can help someone," said Alana. "One person or one village, and it does make an impact."

After her trips, Alana decided to sponsor two more children, one in India and one in Ghana. She has already made plans to visit them.

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THE INVISIBLE ONES

WHAT do you do if you can't prove who you are? All because you do not have a simple piece of paper that we take for granted – a birth certificate.

Antonio was a teacher in Mozambique for seven years until the government legislated that all citizens must have birth certificates in order to receive their salary.

For Antonio, this was the end of his teaching career. He did not have a birth certificate. Legally speaking, he did not exist.

In order to obtain a birth certificate, he would need to travel 100 kilometres from his home to pay a fee he could not afford. His only means of transportation was on foot. He quit his dream of teaching and became a farmer.

None of his children had birth certificates. They needed them to go to school and receive vaccinations.

One of Antonio's older sons, Bartolomeu, had longed to follow in his

father's footsteps and teach. When it came time to enrol in the sixth grade, he was turned away because he simply didn't have the necessary documentation. He also became a farmer.

World Vision's staff in the Derre Area Development Program were able to work with government officials to ensure that people in remote communities, including Antonio and his family, were able to obtain their birth registration cards.

Three of Antonio's children are now World Vision sponsored children.

With the birth registration cards, Antonio said, "Now the children don't face a problem when they want to enrol in school."

World Vision also worked with the government of Mozambique to aid people affected by floods that hit Zambezia Province in the central region of the nation in 2015.

Some of the families had lost their children's birth certificates. Without those pieces of paper, their children could not go back to school.

World Vision worked with government and other organisations to work out ways of ensuring that children obtained new birth certificates.

In areas of Pakistan affected by the 2010 floods, World Vision helped more than 2,600 people obtain or reclaim their birth certificates and national identity cards through the New Life project.

Globally, there are an estimated 230 million children under five across the world whose births are not recorded, according to UNICEF.

That figure excludes China, where figures are unknown.

According to World Vision, more than 135 million children under five in Asia remain invisible to their governments and are unable to fully participate in their communities each year. They are denied education and health services, and are at risk for exploitation, abuse and underage recruitment into armed forces.

A report released by World Vision in 2014 found that many children were dying uncounted and invisible to the health services that could save their lives, because governments and world leaders were failing to properly track vital data about children and their health. Many children born as refugees don't receive proper documentation.

The World Vision report claimed that the real number of unregistered

children is likely to be much higher than the 230 million reported by UNICEF.

While the report highlighted the need for increased access to healthcare and population data, the need for universal birth registration actually goes much deeper than that.

The report pointed out several categories of children who were often completely off the radar to their governments. These included children who were not registered at birth due to their location, children from ethnic minorities, children with disabilities who are often hidden from their communities due to the shame and cultural stigma, orphaned and homeless children, displaced or refugee children, and children who were trafficked for sex or labour exploitation.

Birth registration is a foundation for the protection and wellbeing of children.

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TOO YOUNG TO BE MARRIED

BEFORE she was born, Jenneh was chosen to be a child bride.

A man came to her heavily pregnant mother and said, if the child was a "bouncing baby girl", he would like to marry her. The parents agreed, for the price of an average Australian family meal.

So, on the day of her birth, Jenneh was formally promised in marriage to a much older man. There was little comment about this in her village.

In Sierra Leone, the legal age for marriage is 21. But 18 percent of girls marry before their 15th birthdays and 44 percent before the age of 18.

Hunger, malnutrition and sexual violence are all too real in these communities. Marriage, often a financial transaction, is seen as one way families in crisis can survive and protect their children.

Sadly, the result is that many girls are exposed to even greater harms. Formal education stops. Chronic poverty and social isolation are common. Often under intense pressure to have children while still children themselves, they're confined within roles and responsibilities they didn't choose and often don't understand.

"When I started to get a sense of my own life I was always told that I belonged to a man and someday he would come for me," said Jenneh.

She was just 11 when John – the man who paid her parents a dowry – came to collect her.

The girl had just finished her primary school exams. She loved school and wanted to work in the medical field.

Her family was too poor to continue paying for her education, so John said he would pay for her school when he took her home to a town about 80 kilometres away. He told her their wedding would be in four days.

Jenneh didn't like him. "He was big and, as far as I could see, he seemed too old for me, much older than me. He seemed about 41 years old.

"I didn't tell any of my friends. Some of my friends are in the same situation. Because of their family situation they are pressured and made to accept and are too afraid to say no."

Jenneh told her parents she did not wish to be married. "I was very upset and frightened. My parents told me they had given their word to this man and they were not prepared to change their minds. Tears were running from my eyes and I was very afraid that there was nobody to protect me anymore. I was very sad, that is all I can say."

She decided to run away rather than be forced into marriage as a child.

A friend of the family informed World Vision about Jenneh's situation. World Vision staff came to speak to her parents on the day of the planned wedding.

They quoted the laws against early marriage, and showed the relevance of leaving the children, especially the girl child, at school.

"On the wedding day, when World Vision came, I wasn't completely open to the truth," said Jenneh's father. "I was somehow convinced, though I was not totally happy. But I knew that once World Vision came on the scene, something better would happen because, if they thought the marriage was a good thing, they wouldn't have stopped it."

The wedding was called off. But John said that he would return for the girl he was promised.

World Vision helped Jenneh's family to end the arrangement and keep her in school. Local staff worked with communities to find and understand alternatives for families who think child marriage is their only hope. Working together, field staff, parents, community leaders and brave girls like Jenneh will change this practice. But it takes time, and a willingness to find another

way.

Jenneh now tells everyone proudly: “When you educate a girl, you educate the whole nation. In the future, I want to finish my education first, then I will establish a business.”

In Zambia, Amukusana was married against her will at the age of 14.

“For all the years I lived with my father and stepmother, I never imagined they were planning to push me into marriage at a tender age,” she said. “One night, elderly women, including my grandmother, walked into the room and picked me up.

“They dragged me to some place where I was secluded for some days. There they told me I was grown up so they were going to prepare me for a man whom they had approved to marry me. I was therefore made to go through initiation traditions.”

Amukusana said the man abused her sexually at the age of 14 but, under their traditions, this was when an official marriage began because it had the blessing of parents and other key relatives, including her grandmother.

“My husband was still living with his parents, brothers and sisters. When I got there as his wife, I suffered at the hands of my in-laws, especially his sisters; I used to do almost everything for them. I would be working for them from morning to sunset.

“I was worried about my education, which came to an end. More so, I was worried about having children as young as I was.”

A caregiver in Amukusana’s community reported the matter to World Vision staff, who approached the parents to reverse their decision but they couldn’t accept. Reversing the decision would have meant that the parents pay back the 900 Zambian kwacha ($180) so they stood their ground. But after three months of marriage, Amukusana was allowed to leave her marriage and return home. Amukusana worked to raise money to pay back her parents and then returned to school.

World Vision research suggests that parents in the developing world often marry off their juvenile daughters out of financial desperation rather than cultural pressure.

The 2013 report by World Vision identified a link between conflict and natural disasters and child marriage.

“Early marriage is a brutal curtailment of childhood and a violation of

children's rights, yet many parents around the world believe it is the best possible way to ensure their daughters are looked after," the report stated.

"The public perception in the West is that these types of marriages are down to convention, but our research found that in most cases parents fear the child will starve or have no money, especially when they have lost everything through war.

"They think the only way for their child to have a decent life is to marry her off at a young age. They do it with a heavy heart because they don't really want to marry them off at all."

Last year, 13.5 million girls around the world – that's two-thirds of the Australian population – married before their 18th birthday. Half of all girls living in the least developed countries marry before then, while one in nine girls marry before they turn 15. Most of the world's child spouses live in South Asia (46 percent) and in West and Central Africa (41 percent).

Of the 25 countries with the highest rates of early marriage, the majority are affected by conflict, fragility or natural disasters, the report found. Girls trapped in early marriage tend to be poor, under-educated and living in rural areas where birth and death rates are high and where conflict is common.

The report, *Untying the Knot*, cited the case of a mother called Amira facing the prospect of marrying off her 12-year-old daughter due to the conflict in Syria.

Her family are refugees in Lebanon, where they are forced to rent a home for $134 a month, an exorbitant amount.

Amira, a mother of five, told researchers that 12-year-old Sheereen "will be our survival". Amira is seven months pregnant and, with another mouth to soon feed, she is running out of options.

The report says that when Sheereen was asked for her thoughts at being married at 12, she could not answer.

Did Sheereen dream about her future? Her mother answered for her: "She doesn't answer you because no one has ever asked her this before."

THE last letters Norma ever wrote were to her eight sponsored children around the world. She wanted them to know that she loved them.

Shortly before Norma passed away last year, she was assured her daughter Dianne would take over sponsorship of her World Vision children. Norma had sponsored 38 children in 12 nations – Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya,

Bangladesh, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Philippines, Lebanon, Laos, Rwanda and Sri Lanka – during her 40-year association with World Vision Australia and remembered all their names.

In 2014, when she was 83 years old, Norma travelled to meet one of her sponsored children in Sri Lanka. A World Vision manager in Sri Lanka was moved by the Australian woman's commitment. He wrote in his report: "I feel she is a great supporter for World Vision, and she's filled with love and passionate throughout her life ... and it really motivates me and my staff towards our work for children."

Returning to Australia, Norma told World Vision staff that she had travelled all over the world but that her sponsor visit was "tops, the best trip I had ever been on".

This remarkable woman also contributed to various emergency responses, donated each month to World Vision's work in child protection and, in lieu of flowers at her funeral, her memorial gift was directed to an emergency in Nepal.

Norma's daughter Dianne remembered growing up in a home where caring for others was paramount.

"Mum and Dad had kids coming to stay from a children's home and also we had foster children on and off.

"Mum and Dad were very much into helping other people. Dad used to pick up an old drunk and bring him to church every Sunday night.

"Mum had a great life but she lived like a pauper and she got to do trips overseas on the smell of an oily rag. She made all her Christmas presents because her whole life was about giving to people less fortunate than herself.

"She went all by herself to visit her sponsor child. That was the highlight of her life. I picked her up when she got back and she was so emotional. She said it was the most wonderful experience she had ever had.

"She had a great life. She told me how many stamps I needed and what I had to put in the letters to her sponsor children. She told them she wasn't well. She included a photo of herself and some stickers.

"We are all passionate about the same cause. She presumed we'd look after her sponsor kids and she was right.

"We're such a rich country and we've got everything at our fingertips and

you can spend a little money each month to support a World Vision child. I don't know why more people don't do that."

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A WITNESS TO HIDDEN STORIES

PHOTO-JOURNALIST Ilana Rose is a superb visual storyteller. Her heightened sensitivity toward the human condition has enabled her to capture images which explore the untold stories about social justice and the world's sub-cultures.

Her powerful and evocative photos from around the world have been exhibited and collected by several galleries and arts organisations.

Ilana has been working as a professional photographer and photojournalist for more than 25 years, most recently with World Vision Australia.

"A lot of things led me to World Vision," she said. "From early childhood I was taught to look after other people. I'd worked for the first five years of *The Big Issue* and worked for the Indigenous department of justice in Victoria, the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Smith Family.

"I'm very passionate, and always have been, about social justice so the ability to give back on this global scale with World Vision is incredibly fulfilling.

"It's about telling people's stories who aren't capable of telling it themselves. The hidden stories."

Ten days after she started working with World Vision, Ilana was in Ethiopia.

"I had never before been to Africa and, as we went north, I noticed so much aridness. It looked like a desert area. The first thing that occurred to me was that there was no rubbish. No plastic, nothing. There was nothing to throw away. The people didn't have anything to throw away.

"But the other side of it was the joy of the children. I expected deep sadness but these kids knew no better because there's a certain evenness when everybody is poor. It's not like in Australia, where you have some rich, some poor and that leads to jealousies and the difference between the haves and have-nots. You don't get that over there. Everybody's the same.

"The children were joyous and really engaged."

More recently, Ilana was impacted by the despair and devastation she

witnessed in South Sudan.

“One of the things that left a bad taste in my mouth was going through the university that once had amazing facilities and had been trashed by government and rebel forces.

“So the aspirations of the country and what could be with such a youthful country was just trashed.

“We met quite a few people who had got to first or second year and were looking to really bright futures and were enthusiastic and very intelligent but now had no future. They would never be able to complete their degrees or give back to their communities.”

Ilana has visited World Vision’s community development projects in countries including Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Peru, Bolivia, South Sudan and Indonesia and has taken stills and video for media stories which have appeared in the mainstream media.

One of her recent projects was a collection of poignant portraits of women who are holding communities together in the harshest conditions. The photos appeared in an exhibition titled “Strength Through Adversity”.

“The photos reflect the resilience and dignity and generosity of the people I have met enduring harsh life circumstances during the past three years as a photographer for World Vision,” she said.

“There are stories hidden in their eyes, faces and hands, and within the folds of their clothing, that need to be told to a wide audience.”

“The more I can document the strength and resilience of people who live in some of our world’s most challenging conditions, the more strongly the viewer can see that we are one human race.”

“What comes through to me is the strength of people and I have so much admiration for the people I meet – the children, the mothers and the fathers.”

The work is often challenging. “There’s an amazing amount of good in the world and an amazing lot of bad,” she said.

“You could be incredibly pessimistic but working with the aid workers gives you great hope because there are so many people doing all that they can to help.

“In the short period I’ve been with World Vision, I’ve seen huge

improvement in lives. The resilience of communities keeps you going. I'm optimistic in the long run.

"I went to Zimbabwe and I had no understanding of our food program until we went there. We support families by giving them food, maize and oil and in return a member of the household volunteers to work 18 hours a week for World Vision. One of the projects I saw was dam building and that completely blew me away.

"With engineering help, the community constructs the dams themselves so when we move out of that country after 15 years we've left something substantial.

"The work of World Vision is amazing and beyond comprehension until you go to the field and see how life-altering it is. There's always got to be hope, otherwise you'd give up."

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THE RESCUE OF ROGHINI

NAKUSA and Nakushi are far too common names in India. In Hindi, they literally mean "unwanted" and are the names given by some parents to female children.

A few years ago, a central Indian state held a renaming ceremony for nearly 300 unwanted Indian girls named Nakusa and Nakushi. The girls, mostly teenagers wearing their best outfits, chose new names they hoped would give them a new start in life.

But, even with new names, life for girls in India is tough.

The plight of girls in India came into sharp focus after a 2015 census showed the nation's sex ratio was 943 girls for every 1,000 boys. The latest statistics reveal that India has 44 million more men than women.

Such ratios are the result of abortions of female foetuses, or just sheer neglect leading to a higher death rate among girls.

Social mores about the enormous expense heaped upon families who have to marry off girls is just one reason they are seen as unwanted.

More than 30 percent of Indian girls are married before the age of 15. Others toil in fields, shops, factories and streets, scraping together just enough to keep them and their families alive. Tens of millions do not attend

school.

In India, women and girls like Roghini are the most vulnerable to exploitation because they suffer the consequences of gender inequality.

At the age of just 13, Roghini was taken out of school and forced into bonded labour to repay a family debt. For a long time, Roghini believed that her only means of escape would be suicide.

It began when Roghini's sister became betrothed. Indian tradition dictates that all brides must provide their husbands with a dowry of money and goods at the time of marriage. In addition to this, Roghini's family home desperately needed repairs.

To pay for all this, her parents took out a loan of $50 and Roghini was "mortgaged" to a family who made matchboxes in their home.

"Since I was younger and only studying, it was my responsibility to go to work for the family," she said.

For 11 hours every day, Roghini would sit cross-legged to fold and glue matchboxes. For every 1,500 matchboxes she made, Roghini would be "paid" the equivalent of 30 cents – nowhere near enough to pay off the debt. She was fed on a diet of rice and water, but often went hungry.

Along with Roghini, 20 other children, mostly girls, worked gluing matchboxes in that dark, airless room. The man of the house often threatened and shouted at the girls, using obscene language that would leave them feeling worthless and humiliated.

Roghini became so depressed by her situation that she tried to take her own life. From her point of view, there was no escape from the endless work, no hope of ever going to school again and no time for fun or play. It all added up to an incredibly bleak future.

"I had no education and no future," she said. "I was so distressed and always worried that I would never be released; that my dream would never be fulfilled. After three months I swallowed a lot of pills, but my fate was otherwise."

A local World Vision-supported self-help group heard of Roghini's plight and settled her family's debt. Finally, she was free.

After her freedom was secured, Roghini returned to school. She is a passionate campaigner for children's (especially girls') rights. World Vision is using her experience and its resources to educate neighbouring

communities on laws relating to child labour and fiscal responsibility.

Roghini was a special guest at World Vision's Global Leadership Convention in 2012 in Australia and spoke at several schools. The conventions gave Australian students a forum to learn more about and speak out against issues such as child labour and child exploitation. They were inspired and privileged to hear Roghini's story firsthand.

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COMEDY WITH A CONSCIENCE

LET'S face it; social justice comedy is often not very good comedy. It is too often self-serving, self-indulgent, ineffective and, ultimately, unfunny.

That thought surely struck stand-up comedian Michael Connell when he was asked to write and perform a comedy routine to raise awareness about the issues surrounding global poverty and to spread World Vision's message.

"I've never wanted to be a comedy crusader," he said. "You know: middle class white guys who use comedy as their soapbox to fight the world's injustices.

"There's nothing worse than if you go to a comedy show and the comedian's got some personal little hobby horse and goes into a rant and you feel like you're being preached at for five or 10 minutes."

Despite his reservations, Michael, a sensitive and intelligent comic, accepted World Vision's challenge. He would write a routine about global poverty and perform it in front of a huge crowd at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival.

He admits he had a lot to lose. "I thought perhaps I was just lying to myself, and I really didn't have the skills to create a comedy routine about important issues," he said.

Michael was booked into an introductory training session at the World Vision office and learnt the complexities of aid and development.

"It's not just a case of dumping money somewhere to fix the problem," he said. "World Vision works with communities to give a hand up and not a hand out. After going through the training I began writing the routine. By day I'd write jokes. Then, at night, I'd go and test them at comedy clubs.

Then the next day I'd rewrite the jokes because a lot of them didn't work. It turns out my initial hunch was correct. Finding the balance between raising awareness of poverty while also being funny was extremely difficult. I'd either be depressing people with too many facts, or making them laugh but not really talking about the important issues.

"It was a tough piece to write and I was overwhelmed at first. It was the first time I'd used my comedy specifically for a social justice issue. It was a creative challenge and, the more I learnt about global poverty, the more I became intrigued. I never knew poverty was such a complex issue."

Michael wrote a clever 15-minute set that talked about charity, poverty and "affluenza", fair trade, consumerism and child slavery in the chocolate industry. He ended up performing "The First World Blues" to more than 2,000 people over the course of the comedy festival. The audiences listened … and laughed.

In his act, Michael asked why is it, that even though we have one of the highest standards of living in the world, we're so unhappy. We live in a society with a thousand flavours of ice-cream, iPhones that provide entertainment 24/7, and restaurants that will cook a gourmet hamburger for your dog, but also incredibly high rates of suicide and depression.

Michael then sang (accompanied by his harmonica) his First World Blues and ended with the observation that giving to others – not rampant consumerism – was the way to find true happiness.

"I'm glad people liked it because it was pretty nerve-wracking," said Michael. "I was practising it constantly for a good six or seven months before the performance. Until the first week of the Comedy Festival, it wasn't coming together. Then it did.

"One thing I'm proud of is that I don't think I've compromised my comedy for the sake of the message. I managed to make some important points without having the laughs drop off at any point."

Michael continues to work with World Vision.

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THE MINIATURE WORLD

AN American basketball star was shocked a few years ago to discover that he had been paid about 50 times more for his endorsement of a brand of

sneakers than the combined annual wages of the 22,000 women in Indonesia who assembled them.

Now that's inequality.

Nearly a quarter of humanity – 1.2 billion people – live in absolute poverty on less than $1 a day. They have no medicine, sanitation or proper food.

They don't have mortgages either because most don't have houses. Just shanties.

This is the world we have built.

The Minature Earth project imagined what the world would look like if it was a village of 100 people. Updating, with the same proportions we have today, it would be something like this:

Six people would own 59 percent of the wealth of the entire village community, while 20 would live on less than $1 a day and 43 would be forced to survive without basic sanitation

There would be 60 Asians, 15 Africans, 14 from the Americas and 11 Europeans.

There would be 51 women and 49 men. Between five and six of the women would have been raped.

Of the population, 51 would live in an urban area, 25 would be living in war zones and in daily fear for their lives, 14 would have some sort of disability, and 33 would be Christian, with 18 Muslims, 14 Hindus, six Buddhists, 13 other religions and 16 non-religious.

Five children would be working in slavery conditions and electricity would be off 40 percent of the time.

And 18 would live without an improved water source (35 wouldn't have access to safe drinking water).

Only one woman would own land.

Only seven people would have been educated at a secondary level and 14 would be unable to read, although 65 would be able to read, write and count. There would be 40 villagers with a computer but only three would have internet connection.

One adult aged 15-59 would have HIV and AIDS and 13 villagers would be hungry or malnourished.

In the real world, six million children under the age of five die every year of

hunger.

In the real world, if you keep your food in a fridge, your clothes in a closet and if you have a bed to sleep in, and a roof over your head, you are richer than 75 percent of the world's population.

If you have a bank account, you are in the top eight percent of the world's wealthy.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the fear and loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pain of starvation ... you are better off than 500 million people in the world.

If you woke up this morning healthy, you are more blessed than the millions who will not survive this week.

If you can read this, you are more blessed than over two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

In the real world, the richest one percent own 40 percent of all wealth, while 50 percent of the world's adults own just one percent of the wealth.

If we eat out at a restaurant, we probably will spend more than the average monthly income in Nicaragua or India without thinking.

If we buy a soft drink and a Tattslotto ticket, we probably spend what is a day's wages for many humans.

Global poverty has halved over the last decade, but a staggering 71 percent of the world's population remains low income or poor, living on $10 or less a day.

Obviously, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with money. It is an instrument of commerce. But our quest to hang on to too much of it can give us unrealistic perspectives.

The challenge of money is to use it well. And that sometimes means giving it to the hungry, homeless and forgotten.

Faith can mean seeing justice for the poor as more important than a big superannuation payout and a retirement home.

In the end, how much we earn or stash away will mean nothing. As someone once said: No matter how rich you become, how famous or powerful, when you die the size of your funeral will still pretty much depend on the weather.

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WEALTH IS LIKE MANURE

A WEALTHY woman who spent her time and wealth on herself dreamt one night she was in heaven.

Seeing a large mansion, she was told it was her gardener's. To her shock, her home was only a small cottage.

When she questioned this, she was told by an angel: "Well, we did our best with the materials you sent up."

There's an old Hindu saying that wealth is like manure in a field. It makes a bad smell in a large heap. When spread across a field, the smell is non-existent and the whole soil becomes fertile.

Money spread around helps things grow.

We live in an abundant universe. Australians rank among the most generous people in the world, but, even in our most altruistic suburbs, residents give less than half a percent of their income to charity.

In Australia, 400,000 people sponsor a child with World Vision. A far higher percentage of sponsors come from poorer postcodes, not the richer ones.

That's a discrepancy that should challenge our upper and middle classes, according to Tim Costello.

"It's those who have often known struggle and have empathy that are the most generous," he said.

"Historically we've never had the tradition of [Scottish-American industrialist] Andrew Carnegie who said the man who dies rich dies disgraced. We've said, 'No we pay our taxes; we have a view that government provides a safety net.' We've let our rich off the hook. I think the poor empathise more.

"I've learnt the paradox of human nature that people can show extraordinary generosity, and extraordinary prejudice and blindness and fear and cruelty, and the World Vision experience for me is always trying to understand that puzzle."

Former World Vision Australia and World Vision International board member Simon McKeon, an Australian businessman, philanthropist and sportsman, said many of the wealthy in Australia tend to make excuses for not giving.

"There is no doubt that there is a quiet industry being built up that cocoons

our ultra-wealthy's feelings. For every argument that's put up as to why it's a good thing to give, this little industry has a response to it.

"For example, they might say, 'We don't give because the charities are inherently inefficient.' The conversation doesn't often go too much further.

"For each and every argument why we should do something, there is a counter argument. They say, 'We already all pay a lot of tax or don't give to that country because it's not perfect. We don't give to World Vision because some of what you give is used as overhead.' There's just an excuse for everything.

"I'm privileged to sit around dinner tables with privileged people and I hear this stuff firsthand.

"All I would say is, I suspect over the years we've just been a touch immature because that's not the conversation you hear so much around the world. Bill Gates would turn it around the other way and say, 'I'm not here to say the world is perfect, but I can do my bit to help.'

"I say to people, 'You've amassed enormous wealth and now do you want to have a different experience?'"

Simon embraces the concept of enlightened self-interest – that in doing something for others, people inevitably also reap profound benefits for themselves.

"I'm no saint. I think I need to get something back whether I give money or time," he said. "I've got a whole lot more back than I've ever given. Empathy is a very important trait. Once you empathise, then there's a way forward to do something constructive.

"The richness of experiences to be had in this sector is incredible and everyone should be involved.

"I grew up in a working-class suburb in Melbourne where there was a lot of need. My mum and dad were always involved in various community activities and they seemed to have a lot of fun working in a group helping others. I could see how the experience enriched their lives. I never wanted to let go of what my parents did to help others. My message to others is: don't volunteer for a charity merely out of a sense of obligation, let alone guilt. Do it because you ought to receive a special experience not found in normal daily life. Do it because of the wellbeing it provides to us."

Tim Costello said Australians, as residents in one of the richest and most

developed countries in the world, could afford to give to both domestic and international charities.

“There’s a notion that says charity begins at home and the subtext is: ‘it ends at home as well, let’s just look after our own’,” he said.

“To which I say, Australians have the capacity to do both, we don’t need to set our domestic poor off against overseas poor.”

Tim tells the story of the Feast of Merit that is practised among Christian tribes in Nagaland in north-east India.

In Naga culture, when someone within the community acquires a position of wealth, they can choose to hold a festival – Feast of Merit. The whole community – including the poor and disadvantaged – is invited to join together to share the fruits of the person’s wealth. The feast lasts until all of their assets – everything of value – are shared amongst all of the community. This can often take many weeks. At the end of the festivities, the person is gifted with a golden cloak: the highest sign of recognition. This person returns to their life with nothing, except the gold cloak.

“It amazed me,” said Tim. “Here was an avenue to recognise that we come to this world with nothing and certainly leave taking nothing with us, so the point of wealth is for now – to celebrate community – to bless others and to feed the poor. Relationships and care of others, not possessions or material superiority, are truly the gold standard.”

WHILE preparing for the gruelling trek to the base camp at Mt Everest to raise money for World Vision, Indonesian-born Reni pondered her own long journey which began in a Lombok orphanage.

Life seemed without much hope or promise until the arrival of the first letters from her World Vision sponsors Lyn and Norm Huett in faraway Tasmania.

“My own family was very poor. They had nothing,” Reni remembered. The letters from Australia gave the young girl the vision of a better life.

“When they sponsored me as a child it inspired me to learn English,” Reni said. “When the first letters arrived, they were in English with translation but I wanted to read them in English. I was eager to understand the language myself. If I didn’t receive letters from them I would not have had that willingness to learn. There was nothing that would have inspired me to do that.”

Lyn and Norm had no idea what influence they were having on Reni over the 10 years they were her sponsors.

“We had three children and we thought we could help a child somewhere else as well as our own,” said Lyn. “We sponsored another little boy from the same orphanage as Reni but we didn’t know that at the time. We decided that no matter what happened within the family, we could keep looking after them. Our kids were OK and well looked after, so we started to sponsor. Reni was the third.”

“I just think, if you can help somebody, then help them. If you can help the children from Third World countries you can help the whole place develop.”

By the age of 13, Reni could speak English fluently and studied hard to finish school. At the age of 17, she qualified for a job in the mining industry in Indonesia, then successfully applied for jobs in the same industry in Queensland and then South Australia. “It was always my dream to live in Australia,” she said.

By then, she had lost contact with Lyn and Norm. But she was determined to one day track down and meet her “second parents”.

“But I didn’t know where to start,” she said.

In 2013, the opportunity arose for Reni to climb Mt Kilimanjaro with Team World Vision. One of the World Vision staff asked Reni what had inspired her to fundraise. She told the story of her sponsors and World Vision helped her connect with Lyn and Norm.

Twenty years after they lost contact, Norm and Lyn received a phone call just before Christmas from World Vision to say Reni was looking for them. It was a dream come true for the couple who had often talked of meeting their sponsored child.

“I was in tears,” said Lyn. “World Vision gave us a phone number to get in touch so I rang and left a message. I had only put the phone down a few seconds when she rang back. It was pretty special.”

Soon after, Reni, Lyn and Norm met up in Tasmania. “I just cried and hugged her and she did the same,” said Lyn. Norm said it was the best Christmas present he had received.

During what she described as “a magical weekend”, Reni was able to personally thank Lyn and Norm for the difference they had made in her life. “I was so happy,” Reni says. “It was always something in the back of my

mind to meet up with them. These were the people who inspired me."

When Reni later graduated in business administration in Melbourne she invited Lyn and Norm to the ceremony. There they met Reni's parents from Indonesia. Later, Lyn and Reni went to Indonesia to meet the rest of her family and to visit the orphanage where she grew up.

Aware of the opportunities that had come her way through child sponsorship, Reni decided to give something back – and now she sponsors five children through World Vision, four in Africa and one in Peru.

In recent years, Reni has scaled Mt Kilimanjaro, trekked in Peru and climbed to Mt Everest base camp to raise money for World Vision's work.

"What I want the most is to help children in need – just like child sponsorship had helped me to be who and what I am today," she wrote to her supporters of the Mt Everest climb.

"The joy of giving is far greater than receiving! Especially if the gift we give creates hope."

After her gruelling four-day trek with World Vision Australia to Peru's Machu Picchu, Reni met Aldo, her Peruvian sponsored child.

"He was shy at first, but within minutes he was singing and dancing around," she said.

Reni said Aldo's family were quick to express their gratitude for Reni's faithful support and the positive changes it was making possible in their community.

"His family are farmers and it's given them facilities and training to manage animals. My donations also mean Aldo can do things like study and play soccer.

"Sponsorship doesn't just improve living conditions," Reni said, "it gives children hope – and that's the greatest gift of all."

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THE BOY WITH THE GUN

IN Lebanon, Tanya Penny found a simple touch could bring about a bond with a boy with a gun.

"There are words we are trained not to use as humanitarian communicators," she said. "Traumatised is one of them. It's a word with a

very specific meaning applied in specific circumstances. But, as I looked at this little boy standing with a plastic gun aimed at my head, I could think of no other word.

“He is 10 years old, living with his family in an informal tented settlement in Lebanon. His family fled Syria two years ago. During their journey across the border his father was shot five times. This little boy watched me and my camera intently as my colleagues spoke with his sister and little brother. His stance was casually alert, his shoulders relaxed as he leaned against the wooden frame, but his grip on his toy gun was firm. His eyes were too aware of every movement made. He was acting as their guard, their protector.

“When he was unhappy with words spoken or the aim of the camera, he kicked, pushed and yelled. I didn’t react as he tried to push me. Nor did I flinch when he raised his toy gun to my head. When he turned the toy gun on himself, I knelt down to meet him eye to eye.

“He never looked scared and his guard didn’t drop as I tried to smile at him. It was instinct to reach out to him. I lightly placed my hand on his shoulder and rhythmically tapped my finger up and down. It was something I had learned in a psychological first-aid training course. Like most of those courses, you never really think that the simulations they put you through will become your reality. I wished in that moment I had paid more attention, read more of the materials they suggested. The tapping thing was all I could remember. I have no idea how or why this works but somehow it did.

“He allowed me to gently pull the toy gun out of his mouth. I spoke to him in English. He spoke back to me in Arabic. Neither of us could understand each other but somehow the simple touch of my hand on his back formed a connection. He leant in closer to me and, before I knew it, his head rested on my shoulder.

“He remained by my side for the rest of the day. He would still at times kick and push the passing people in the camp. But he would also now smile. I even managed to teach him how to high five. Up high, down low ... too slow. He laughed each time we played this. And, as we said goodbye at the end of the day, he leaned once more into my side. He stood by the car waving goodbye to me as our car pulled away; the toy gun still in his hand.”

Tanya Penny was a media and communications officer at World Vision Australia. She is now director of humanitarian and emergency affairs global

communications and information management at World Vision International.

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GETTING TO THE CORE

IT was once said that the mountain rainforest climate of Ethiopia's highlands was potentially capable of growing everything except apples. Now Ethiopia is crazy for apples. It's a great cash crop, thanks to Australian aid.

Apple production in Ethiopia dates back to the 1940s when British Mennonite missionaries introduced the fruit and taught the locals how to grow them.

The missionaries took their investment further and also established an apple orchard. The orchard was later destroyed when the Dergue military junta took power from the Imperial government. The Dergue made it a point to expel most missionaries from the country and, subsequently, the practice of growing temperate fruits came to a temporary halt.

Two decades ago, one church in eastern Ethiopia started growing apples as a food source for the local population and studied which varieties of the fruit could best grow in the few areas with suitable climate for the project.

Two formal nurseries were established after World Vision distributed hardy seedlings to the community. The experiment paid off.

Gradually, the apple trees grew and more families began cultivating and selling the apples. World Vision was able to secure funding from the Australian Government for a three-year market linkage and apple quality improvement grant to establish new markets for the apples.

The project has linked apple growing cooperatives with three major buyers, as well as a local university committed to improved apple production research.

It has also enabled the community to earn better incomes. Now one kilogram of apples that used to sell for 25 Ethiopian birr ($1.60) three years ago now sell for double that price at 50 birr ($3.20). The community now uses blenders to make apple juice, which extends the life of their apples and creates a new product for the market.

Farmers also sell their seedlings, opening up an avenue to increase their earnings as well as participating in the reforestation of their area.

In addition to their dietary value, apple trees can enhance soil conservation in Ethiopian highlands.

The Australian project has also empowered Ethiopian women.

Zufan, who has been trained on apple seedling management and care, and has benefited from selling apples as part of a cooperative, said in the past apple cultivation had been considered to be a man's job.

"But World Vision trained women as well in apple seedling care and apple production. We realised we were capable of taking care of these trees just as well as our husbands and fathers [can].

"You don't need a large area of land to have a tree, so it is easy for even those of us that are poor to have a few trees on our land. Additionally, because the trees are near our homes, we can manage them easily while also tending to other household chores."

The Ethiopian Institute of Agricultural Research recently said that Ethiopia now has huge potential for large-scale production of high quality apples.

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THE NEED AT HOME

CAROL Moore has a deep love for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It led her to work with them in a remote part of the country and to become a passionate supporter of World Vision's Australia Program.

"My heart and spirit just went out to these people and I thought, 'I don't know what one person can do but one person can join with somebody else and do something,'" she said.

"I have so much, and there has to be more that I can do to help."

Carol's journey with World Vision began in the late 1960s when she and her husband Rob sponsored a child from Vietnam.

"We hadn't had our own children at the time and we thought it was important for us to support other people's children before we had our own. As a Christian I was aware of the plight of a lot of kids in the sixties."

One Christmas, as a special gift, Rob gave Carol sponsorships of more World Vision children.

"It was a great gift," said Carol. "We had had a little boy from China, another boy from Vietnam and a girl from South Africa."

In 2003, Carol and Rob visited Alice Springs for the first time and became aware of the challenges facing people in their own country.

“Learning a bit more about our Indigenous people in their zone and realising what we white people have done to our Indigenous brothers and sisters was a revelation,” she said.

“From that time, I was much more aware of the needs of Indigenous people.”

Later, Carol volunteered with Indigenous Community Volunteers and lived in a Warlpiri-speaking community in the Tanami Desert.

“That was when I became much more aware of World Vision’s involvement. The project I was working on was partly funded by World Vision.

“The wise older women – the aunties – in the community decided that education for the children was paramount.

“There was a child learning centre and an adult learning centre and I was asked to go and work in the early childhood centre. My heart just went out to the people. I learnt how people survive and what little I could do to help.

“As our overseas sponsor children are growing up and becoming self-sufficient, Rob and I are diverting our funds into the Australia Program.

“There are many issues here within the Australian community such as health needs, education needs, employment needs.

“I won’t give a donation to any organisation unless I fully research where the money is going and how it’s going to be used. We are thrilled that the money in World Vision is going on projects which to us have a more far-reaching effect, long-lasting effect.

“World Vision has a heart for this. They don’t just put money in but they put their heart into it too.”

Drawing on more than 60 years of international development experience, World Vision understands each community is different and has specific needs. In Australia, World Vision works alongside Indigenous communities to empower local people to drive the change they want.

There are many challenges.

The average non-Indigenous Australian life expectancy is 80 years for men, 83 years for women. The average life expectancy for Indigenous Australians is 74 years for women and 69 years for men.

Infant mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost double that of non-Indigenous children.

Indigenous Australians are three times more likely to suffer from diabetes and four times more likely to be hospitalised for chronic health conditions.

One out of five Indigenous Australian children cannot read at the minimum standard and only 40 percent of Indigenous Australians complete Year 12, compared to 70 percent of non-Indigenous people.

Despite these challenges, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people possess incredible strength, leadership and vision to overcome disadvantage.

World Vision has been working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to capitalise on these strengths since 1974. The partnership began when World Vision was approached by Indigenous Christian leaders to support them in developing leadership and engagement skills. In 1996, World Vision expanded its remit to working with remote Indigenous communities, and since then has partnered with more than 20 communities across Australia to improve health, education and life outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Today, the suite of Australia Program projects focuses on early childhood, youth leadership and community governance.

The Warlpiri Early Childhood Care and Development Project is run in four remote communities in the Northern Territory. The project supports children, parents and families through a range of early childhood and community development activities, including playgroups and community reference groups.

World Vision is also supporting Indigenous youth to be strong and confident leaders through the Young Mob Leadership program in New South Wales. The project supports youth to strengthen their sense of identity and culture, while helping them cultivate and build leadership skills.

In Western Australia's Pilbara region, World Vision has partnered with a local Aboriginal organisation, Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ), to deliver the Martu Leadership Program. The program equips Martu participants with leadership and governance skills for effective engagement in both Martu and mainstream society.

Everything World Vision does is geared towards creating independence for

Indigenous Australians to drive the change they want to see in their lives and communities. Where there is an invitation to collaborate, and a clear contribution to make, World Vision is committed to walking and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for change.

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HOPE FOR CHILDREN OF A CHILD BRIDE

SUZY Sainovski worked with photographer Ken Duncan in Bangladesh to capture images for the book *Vision of Hope*: *Mother and Child*.

“I have a soft spot for Bangladesh,” she said. “I loved the time I spent there with World Vision in 2011 and had a strong feeling I would return some day.”

A year later, she was back in the nation with Ken Duncan and visited a slum in the capital city, Dhaka. Here she met 18-year-old Shashida, who had been forced to marry at 14 – not an uncommon practice in Bangladesh. She had her first child at 15, then another at 17 and was living in a one-room house made from tin and corrugated iron, with a very low roof and a dirt floor. Her family’s clothing was drying in the doorway.

In the slum, the temperature in the rooms exceeds 40 degrees in the summer. There is a communal cooking area, a water pump for washing bodies and clothes and a shared drop toilet. The slums are crowded, narrow and ramshackle.

Early pregnancy and early marriage are common in Bangladesh, particularly among the poor. People living in poverty who cannot afford to keep their daughters at home often marry them off at a young age. Babies are often born with a low birth weight, and stunted growth and malnourishment are common.

Although she was thrown into adulthood way too soon and was living in poverty, Shashida was determined her daughters wouldn’t endure a similar fate. She did not want them to marry young or have limited opportunities.

“I hope to make my daughters educated to help them stand on their own feet,” she told Suzy.

“Gender equality is an issue very dear to my heart, so it was inspiring to hear her say that,” said Suzy.

WHEN retirees Ron and Maureen Gardner travelled to Bangladesh to meet their sponsored child, they were carrying love and wishes from their seven grandchildren.

"It wasn't just Ron and I going on the trip. It was the wishes of our grandchildren," said Maureen.

For the couple in Warragul, Victoria, sponsoring Rina had become part of their family life.

All of their seven grandchildren send letters and drawings to Rina. And when Rina writes back, she always includes a drawing of a flower. Maureen photocopies the letters for her grandchildren.

They became sponsors after an overseas trip in 2003. "We wanted to sponsor a child for a long time but didn't have the courage to do anything," said Maureen. "After seeing Bangladesh and India, we knew we needed to do something positive. We had seen a lot of poverty.

"We fell in love with Bangladesh. We saw how poor it was and how much the people needed help."

They have travelled twice to Sheipur in northern Bangladesh to meet Rina, who they had sponsored since she was 10. On their most recent trip, the child and her family greeted them with garlands and rosebuds. They were then guests at a village concert.

"To see these children performing their traditional songs is something I will never forget," said Maureen. "We met all the teachers and students and it was a life-changing experience for us."

Maureen kept thinking of her grandkids in Australia and how different their lives were. She is grateful that they have become part of the child sponsorship journey and have learnt more about the realities of life in the developing world.

Every Christmas since, instead of buying gifts for the family, the grandchildren buy small gifts – such as pens and pencils – that the couple can give to children in Rina's village on their next visit.

"Then we have a wrapping day when all our kids get together and wrap the presents. They love being a part of all this."

On their recent trip to see Rina, the couple noticed that the local school was basically a tin shed that lacked basic facilities, including running water and toilets.

“We came home and decided we would do something about that,” said Maureen.

The Gardners held several garage sales and the local primary school held a gold coin donation day for them to raise money for World Vision. They raised $3,000 to repair the school in Bangladesh.

They have planned a third trip to see Rina in Bangladesh. They hope their experiences will encourage others to take on the rewarding task of sponsorship.

“We look forward to going back to Bangladesh,” said Maureen. “I’d be happy to go back every year if we could.

“If every sponsor could get to meet their child they would get a deeper insight into what their money is doing for that community.

“Our little bit we give is just a little bit but it helps. You’ve got to do a little bit for others. That’s so important in life.”

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A CAUSE FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS

ONE of George Savvides’ favourite quotes is from Mother Teresa of Kolkata (Calcutta): “I am just a pencil in the hand of a writing God who is writing a love letter to the world.”

The son of Greek Cypriot parents who arrived in Australia in 1950, George was the first person in his family to go to university. He studied industrial engineering, and also philosophy of religion and existentialism.

The committed Christian went on to become one of Australia’s visionary business leaders. He now heads Australia’s largest private health insurer, Medibank Private, and is chairman of the World Vision Australia board.

He joined the World Vision Australia board in 1997 and also served 10 years on the board of World Vision International.

George describes World Vision as “a Christian humanitarian organisation which shares its expression of faith by rolling up its sleeves to care for children caught up in poverty”.

He is a man with a busy schedule. Yet he finds his work with World Vision invigorating.

“There are some things in life that drain you and you need rest. That’s what

work is about. And there are other things in life that sometimes fall into the pattern of everyday activities that you draw energy from.

“And certainly in the World Vision context, despite it being a burden on diary time, on the energy and sense of aliveness level, it nurtures me. It gives you a sense of why you exist and what you try to do in the world.”

He said one of the major challenges with World Vision has been “the constant conversation about whether we become a church brand or a total open market brand in Australia”.

“It started as a total open market and (former communications director) David Toycen was always using media and messages to all Australians to make a difference in the world by sponsoring a child.

“Unlike in the US, where the brand was strongly associated with faith communities, in Australia it was a brand for all Australians to express their compassion and kindness to other people through sponsoring a child and people in need.

“Every now and then we would ask ourselves the question of whether this was the right place to be. There are other organisations much more tightly associated with faith communities. We certainly don’t want to dilute our relationship with faith-based communities. It is very important for us and our stakeholders to know we are an expression of the church’s compassion for the world.

“But we think all Australians can be humanised by caring for another person and we’ve become a vehicle for that. We’ve always resolved to stay where we are, which is a voice for all.”

George believes World Vision’s knowledge of “need on the ground” has been a valuable insight for governments.

“Given our quite detailed investment as a partnership, not just World Vision Australia but all the World Visions that sit in Asia and the Pacific region, we’ve been able to be, not just at arm’s length to academically report to governments about need. We are actually in there on the ground.

“Parliamentarians have visited many World Vision projects over the years and they’ve been able to come back with much more informed understanding of how complex poverty is to fix. How money alone doesn’t help a starving child.

“It’s the development work around the community that creates sustainability

for that child. So that complexity of development brought into the understanding of government means that government policy becomes more sophisticated and informed."

Seeing World Vision's work has also transformed George.

"There were some moments of transformation in the slums of Jakarta where six million people lived," he said.

"We met people in shanty shacks built on top of cemeteries surrounded by open sewers. But we also saw a sponsored urban development program and witnessed the pride of the parents with a young child with their uniforms and simple little books. In this difficult context there was this beautiful piece of light that was shining.

"You saw hope and opportunity being unlocked in a place where the default setting would not unlock it. World Vision had intervened to change the cycle. That was a very powerful impression that was made. And the sad bit was the eyes of the children when you left those visits and the need you could see in their eyes. You knew this was a job not finished.

"Another trip that affected me was when I was in a little African school building and the children were assembled to greet us and about 30 kids wanted to sing a welcome song. I was sitting there expecting a simple little nursery rhyme and heard this beautiful harmony chorus. I nearly fell off my seat. I didn't expect it. To see the beauty you sometimes have to go beyond the surface."

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THE COMMUNITIES OF FAITH

AS a faith-based NGO, World Vision has long partnered with many Christians across the denominations in the mutual journey of faith in action.

Churches are vital in helping World Vision to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies, to help with development work and to speak out against the exploitation of the poor and oppressed.

The Edge Church in Adelaide, for example, has been a supporter of World Vision for 20 years.

The church's founding pastor, Danny Guglielmucci, said the connection had become stronger in the past decade, through his friendship with Tim

Costello.

“I’ve been involved in the work World Vision does in gathering pastors around the country to talk about wider issues of poverty. I’m an advocate for World Vision and share that journey with church leaders who might not be aware of all that World Vision does.

“It’s more than being a church that sponsors. There is a sense of ownership in working together. I feel I’m connected to the team as well as the work.”

Pastor Danny grew up in a Pentecostal church “where everything was done within four walls”.

“In the seventies and eighties it was about bringing people to church, so everything the church did was inward looking. Spirituality was not seen in the context of social justice. I never felt fully comfortable that that was the full expression of the gospel.

“Twenty years ago, at the formation of our church, our motto was ‘serving the community with a message of hope and love’. I never fully understood what that meant. But I always thought it was going to be an outward church that touched the community.

“Ten years ago, I was on leave and during general Bible studies things began to unpack in scripture about things I hadn’t seen before. At the formation of that vision, one of the scriptures that became very powerful to me was Isaiah 49 which says ‘You will go to the nations’. It dawned on me that we would partner with community.

“The reason why I chose World Vision was because it was respected in our secular community as well as the church community as a genuine organisation that sent money to where the work was being done. The whole missionary heart of World Vision was in line with what I thought we were called to do.”

Another partner with World Vision is Bayside Church in Melbourne. Pastor Rob Buckingham talks of the gospel’s holistic message, which encompasses social justice.

“If you go back to the days of William Booth and the Salvation Army in London, for example, you realise that out of that came some who believed social justice and helping others was the sole expression of the gospel. When the Pentecostal movement hit at the start of last century, it was a kind of rebellion against that.

“What’s happened over the past few decades is a gradual understanding that it is not either social justice or saving souls, but that it’s both.

“It’s not just about feeding hungry people but it’s very hard to tell a starving person of their need for Jesus until you give them a meal.”

Bayside’s congregation regularly supports World Vision’s work. It raised $11,000 in one weekend to help victims of earthquakes in Nepal.

One of Bayside’s core values is generosity. It goes far beyond giving money. It is about living a generous life.

“From my experience, generosity is one of the hardest things to plant,” said Pastor Rob. “Generosity is like an oak tree. It takes a long time to plant and a long time to grow. Once it has grown, it is very hard to kill it.”

Bayside also emphasises the value of relationships.

“Everything we do, I like it to be out of relationship,” said Pastor Rob. “Otherwise it’s just giving money to an organisation. I’ve known Tim Costello for many years and I regard him highly. I know and trust him, so anything he leads I know and trust. It’s a no-brainer for me.

“I love the fact that you get feedback from World Vision. The week after we raised the $11,000 for Nepal, World Vision gave us a DVD and we showed it in church so that the people know this is where their money has gone. I love that level of accountability.”

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YOUTH AT THE FRONT

WORLD Vision’s youth ambassadors are 17 to 21-year-old people who are standing up for the rights of children and communities around the world. In 2015, they were challenged and inspired after visiting East Timor and Vietnam with World Vision.

One of them was Jamie Conlon, who became inspired to apply for a youth ambassador role after attending a World Vision Global Leaders Convention in 2014.

“I absolutely loved having the opportunity to inspire others like me to make a difference in this world and, after the whole campaign, I applied for the youth ambassador role because it would mean I would be able to continue to do that, inspire others like me to change the world,” he said.

Jamie led his school's campaign to raise $65,000 for the 40 Hour Famine and after attending the Global Leaders Convention, became passionate about World Vision's work and decided to act on that passion.

As a youth ambassador in 2015, Jamie travelled to Vietnam "with a mindset that I was going to see things that would shock me and shake me", and to witness injustices that would spur him on to encourage other young Australians to stand up against poverty.

"Now, while there were definitely things that led to these types of feelings, the main message I got from the communities we visited was actually hope," he said.

"I got to see that aid and development work actually does work. It sounds like a simple message, but it is one that many people do not hear about enough. And I think that is a far stronger message for me to speak about and I am now more passionate than ever because of that experience."

On the trip, he learnt about ethical tourism and what measures to take to become an ethical tourist.

"We learnt all the theory for it, specifically not to give to children begging or selling things, otherwise we would be encouraging this practice, and the children are often being exploited in this process. But when a seven-year-old Vietnamese boy in perfect English asked me to buy a lantern while we were walking through a market, I realised how hard it is to say no, and how hard it is to be an ethical tourist.

"Something I had to learn in my time in Vietnam was that we should have soft hearts, but a hard head. My soft heart wanted to help this boy, but my hard head knew that giving him money was not necessarily the best thing for him. It was such a brief encounter with that boy but it really did help shape the way I thought about the things we were learning."

"We saw lots of different types of communities in Vietnam that World Vision was working in, and World Vision had been in those communities for all different amounts of time. Seeing the communities who had World Vision in there for long amounts of time really changed the way I saw in the communities where World Vision had just started. The change we saw in one Area Development Program (ADP), where World Vision had been working for 15 years gave me a very positive outlook on the ADPs where World Vision had just started their work.

“World Vision’s work to fight human trafficking in Vietnam, by educating youth of the dangers, was really great to see. Who knows what difference these simple programs will make to these communities in the future?”

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THE LESSON OF TIMOR

A SENSE of social justice came naturally to World Vision youth ambassador Kate Gaylard. At a young age, Kate was often the mediator between her two sisters in the classic fight for the front seat, or for the ongoing battle for the TV remote.

“Naturally, as I started to grow up, I realised I was living in a world that faced challenges much bigger than our family car seating arrangements,” said the World Vision youth ambassador.

“My school embedded social justice teachings into our curriculum, so ever since I started high school I was both shocked and interested to learn about the world and global issues.”

In Year 10, Kate had the opportunity to work at a school in a remote Aboriginal community, south of Alice Springs.

“Being 16 at the time, I was exposed to a world that was starkly different to my home and I found it hard to comprehend the differences despite living in the same country. Although I experienced some magical moments, met some incredible people and learnt so much about the Aboriginal culture and history; I found it extremely hard to ignore the lack of fundamental resources this community had – particularly in healthcare and education.”

At the end of 2014, Kate helped to coordinate a music festival that raised $60,000 for East Timor.

“After crunching the numbers and realising the impact that the money had on the respective Timorese people’s lives, I wanted to do more,” she said. “I had watched 5,000 young people from my region gather together for an incredible cause. They had all proven to me that the youth of Australia do care and, when given the opportunity, they can participate in the fight to make poverty history.”

In her youth ambassador role Kate recently visited East Timor.

“It was my first time overseas, so it literally was like a whole different world,”

she said. “At the beginning I focused a fair bit on the differences between Timor and Australia – from the most basic things like the way they drive and what they eat, to the more serious issues like their access to basic resources, such as healthcare, education, food and water.

“However, as the trip progressed, I started to focus more and more on our similarities. I found that the poverty in Timor was quite obvious, so I made a conscious effort to see past the physical circumstances and get to know people for who they were rather than the situations that they’re in. I figured that I could research the statistics and background behind the causes of poverty in Timor, but I wouldn’t be able to Google the stories of people who are living and breathing this reality.

“I caught myself having truly magical moments with some of the most incredible people – mucking around and dancing with kids or playing silly jokes with some of the older women. These are what the highlights of my trip became. These basic human connections were some of the strongest similarities that I experienced.”

Kate was inspired by the example of Miranda, a volunteer health worker who is a vital link between World Vision and her community.

“Miranda showed me how important it is to value the impact that one person can make,” said Kate. “Often we see poverty as an issue that we as individuals can’t change, however I’ve learnt that every single person has a part to play in combatting this issue. Miranda is just one person, but she plays such an integral part in the development of her community.

“Every week, she volunteers her time and walks around to all the mothers and soon-to-be mothers in the area, with the aim to educate them on how to raise healthy children. She emphasises the importance of healthcare and offers a kind of maternal support.”

“Miranda is also essential to the success of the maternal and child care at the local health post; she also manages to run a mothers club to ensure the health of both the mothers and their babies in her community. Miranda has made a world of difference to so many lives and it has shown me just how important it is for each individual person to know that they can make a real tangible difference with even the smallest of actions.

“It’s hard to sum up my experience in a few sentences. I look back on my journal and read about the stories we heard that broke our hearts. I read my descriptions of places and issues that just shouldn’t exist. But the main

thing I took away from my trip was hope. I saw people standing up to their situation; I saw people empowering themselves and their communities alongside World Vision; I saw a want and a need for a better future.

"Coming back to Australia, I felt lighter. I came back with so much motivation to keep the support for World Vision's projects going, because I know that they work and I know how important they are. I had seen it in a statistic before, but there's nothing quite like seeing how real families benefit from these programs. They are quite literally, life-changing, just like my experience in Timor-Leste.

"As I continue to learn and grow, my understanding of why I do what I do, deepens. I think the 'why' is really important as it keeps me focused, motivated and grounded. I often think about how I could've easily been born in a developing country like East Timor. It's hard to imagine yourself being the subject of poverty; but if I were, I'd hope that there was someone out there advocating for me. I would want someone to stand alongside me. I want to be this person for millions of people around the world; and I hope that I can motivate others to do the same.

"I am extremely determined in getting people who aren't traditionally engaged in social justice involved in any way that they can. I know that it's easy for young people to be disengaged with these issues because they're so big. It's easy for people to be deterred from assisting, because any sort of resolution almost seems impossible. However, I want to show everyone that they don't have to make 'ending poverty' their life mission – they just have to do their part and know that every contribution makes a difference."

SOME kids seem born with a beautiful sense of social justice and compassion for others.

Elijah was just eight, Asher, only six and Aliya, four, when they flicked through the World Vision Australia gift catalogue their mother had brought home before Christmas.

"We were talking about what presents we were giving to whom and one of the kids asked if we could raise money for something in the gift catalogue," said their mother Kirra.

"They decided they wanted to buy a well for a community in Tanzania and had all these ideas to raise money. One wanted to do crafts or make necklaces and then they said, 'Why don't we make lemonade?'"

The kids convinced Kirra they were serious, and set about making a sign promoting World Vision's work for their lemonade stand.

Kirra shared the young activists' plans on her Facebook page and oversaw the lemonade-making, but left the three children to organise and promote the day themselves.

They were up at 5.30am on the first day, setting up the lemonade stand outside their Melbourne home.

"They made their own signs and painted things and said, 'We're doing this to get a well for World Vision,' and people would come and buy a glass of lemonade and drop in $50," said Kirra. "People were wonderfully generous.

"We'd get bags of lemons left on our doorstep and we'd get envelopes with money dropped into our letterbox with notes saying 'this is for the kids' lemonade stand'."

The children also dropped by the World Vision office, where their mum works, to set up a pop-up stand and raise more for their cause.

After three or four lemonade stalls, they raised $1,425 for the well in Tanzania.

"It's been such a wonderful thing for them to see the generosity of others in responding to their plan," said Kirra.

"World Vision has always been part of our family conversations and the kids are very much into helping others.

"They still want to help World Vision. They've been talking about having a hot chocolate stand soon."

In Sydney, a school girl named Emily had a similar passion for actively helping World Vision's work. The keen 10-year-old swimmer decided to raise funds to provide clean water for children in need and asked family and friends to sponsor her swimming laps at her local pool.

Her aim was to swim as many laps as possible in the 25 metre pool in one hour.

By the end of one hour, Emily had swum 80 laps of the 25 metre pool – twice the farthest distance she has ever swum before.

"I got tired but what kept me going was thinking of how much they need it ... I think it's important that children get clean water to keep them healthy," said the determined young girl.

Emily raised more than $1,400 – enough to provide clean drinking water for an entire community.

"I wanted to help poor children because we have so much and helping others is what God wants me to do and I love helping," she said.

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THE MISSION HASN'T CHANGED

APOLLO 8 astronaut Frank Borman was moved to tears the first time he glimpsed our tiny fragile planet from outer space.

"When you're finally up at the moon looking back on earth, all those differences and nationalistic traits are pretty well going to blend, and you're going to get a concept that maybe this really is one world and why the hell can't we learn to live together like decent people," he later said.

Michael Collins, a traveller on Apollo 11, said he believed that, if the political leaders of the world could see their planet from the moon, their outlook could be fundamentally changed.

"That all-important border would be invisible, that noisy argument silenced. The tiny globe would continue to turn, serenely ignoring its subdivisions, presenting a unified façade that would cry out for unified understanding, for homogeneous treatment," he said.

Edgar Mitchell, an Apollo 14 astronaut, put it more bluntly. "From out there on the moon, international politics look so petty. You want to grab a politician by the scruff of the neck and drag him a quarter of a million miles out and say, 'Look at that, you son of a bitch.'"

There finally seemed to be political will to make positive change on the fragile planet at the beginning of the new millennium, when 91 member countries of the United Nations – including Australia – united with a common objective: to fight global poverty and inequality.

They set eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) along with a deadline of 31 December 2015.

The MDGs, which were drawn up by a group of men in the basement of the United Nations headquarters (or so the legend goes), were to eradicate extreme poverty, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal

health, combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development.

World Vision and other humanitarian agencies embraced the MDGs as a blueprint for achieving a brighter future for all people.

According to a United Nations report in 2015, through the work of the United Nations, governments, and organisations such as World Vision, significant progress was made toward achieving all eight of the goals.

MDGs had helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, and to enable more girls to attend school than ever before.

The report stated that, two decades ago, nearly half of the developing world lived in extreme poverty. The number of people now living in extreme poverty had declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. Most progress had occurred since 2000.

In 2015, 91 percent of the global population is using an improved drinking water source and the primary school net enrolment rate in the developing regions has reached 91 percent in 2015, up from 83 percent in 2000.

The number of out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide had fallen by almost half, to an estimated 57 million in 2015, down from 100 million in 2000.

Despite population growth in the developing regions, the number of deaths of children under five had declined from 12.7 million in 1990 to almost six million in 2015 globally.

The maternal mortality rate fell 45 percent worldwide, with most of the reduction occurring since 2000.

More than 6.2 million malaria deaths were averted between 2000 and 2015, while tuberculosis prevention, diagnosis and treatment interventions saved an estimated 37 million. Measles vaccination helped prevent nearly 15.6 million deaths.

New HIV infections fell by approximately 40 percent between 2000 and 2013, from an estimated 3.5 million cases to 2.1 million.

Worldwide, 2.1 billion had gained access to improved sanitation.

Yet for all the remarkable gains, inequalities persist and progress has been

uneven.

About 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and suffer from hunger. Children from the poorest 20 percent of households are more than twice as likely to be stunted as those from the wealthiest 20 percent and are also four times as likely to be out of school. In countries affected by conflict, the proportion of out-of-school children increased from 30 percent in 1999 to 36 percent in 2012.

Global emissions of carbon dioxide have increased over 50 percent since 1990 and water scarcity now affects 40 percent of people in the world and is projected to increase.

Women continue to face discrimination at work, difficulties in accessing economic assets and participating in private and public decision making. Women are also more likely to live in poverty than men. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the ratio of women to men in poor households increased from 108 women for every 100 men in 1997 to 117 women for every 100 men in 2012, despite declining poverty rates for the whole region.

By the end of 2014, conflicts had forced almost 60 million people to abandon their homes – the highest level recorded since the Second World War. If these people were a nation, they would make up the 24th largest country in the world.

About 16,000 children still die each day before celebrating their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes.

Much still needs to be done.

World Vision will focus on ensuring that new global goals reach the most vulnerable children. It will continue to play its part on the world stage by addressing hunger, malnutrition, preventable child deaths and violence.

World Vision believes it is possible to end extreme poverty by 2030. There is a reason for hope if all of us confront the realities.

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A FINAL THOUGHT

IMAGINE waking up every morning with the fear that *your child* might die that day.

What if *you* had virtually nothing and had to scrape by every day, worried about necessities like food and water and shelter?

Imagine having to walk for several kilometers to get water (which makes *your children* sick when they drink it). And then having to find the energy to walk long distances for the nearest medical help and having *your child* die on the way of a medically preventable disease?

Imagine another of *your children* going blind because they are vitamin A deficient.

How would *you* feel if you couldn't even keep *your children* warm? Would *your* heart break?

Imagine *your children* not having the opportunity of learning to read and write. Imagine having no hope for the future as *you* literally struggle to get through each day. Would *you* feel unloved, unwanted and uncared for? Would *you* hope and pray that someone would come to help?

The scenario is not a fantasy. It is played out daily in so many parts of the world. But it's not easy for us to relate to extreme poverty, unless perhaps we can imagine our own children being born through no fault of their own into a place with no hope.

What if we looked at our own blessed children, thanked God they were born into a nation that cares, and believed part of our purpose in life was to support others far less fortunate?

What kind of world would we want, for ourselves, for our children, for our children's children?

It takes so little to be part of the global solution. A donation to World Vision can keep children safe from waterborne diseases, provide life-saving maternal care for mothers, give children an education and change the lives of entire communities in a variety of ways.

Even a smaller donation can make a huge difference to the lives of some. As World Vision founder Bob Pierce said: "Don't do nothing just because you can't do everything. Do something."

I was trained to be a cynical journalist. A long time ago, a respected sub-editor for a major metro newspaper took me aside and told me "the facts of life".

He said: "Say you had to choose what story to put on page one and you had one story about an Australian dying in a landslide overseas and another

of 5,000 people dying in a flood in Bangladesh. Which one is more important?"

He explained it like this. In news terms, one Australian death is worth the death of four Britons, half a dozen Americans, 30 Germans, 1,000 Africans or Latin Americans and 20,000 Asians.

It was my first lesson in news ethics. Or perhaps a lesson on the way the media works.

Thank God then, that World Vision has a different equation; one that values all people as equal in God's eyes.

We live in the age of over-information. That's not the same as good information.

With the advent of social media, Twitter, internet blogs etcetera we're bombarded with mass media messages every day.

The most prominent of which is that happiness and success in life is best measured by one's possessions and power. You're happier if you acquire. And charity, unless it begins at home, is irrelevant and jarring.

Why should we think that needy Australians have more value than the needy elsewhere? Why would someone fortunate enough to have an Australian birth certificate be more important and worth more than someone with an Indian birth certificate?

If we say charity begins at home, does that imply that charity should end there? Standing up for one cause does not mean we shouldn't care about other causes.

As World Vision ambassador Mel Doyle said: "Sure, we have our own poor. But there's a big difference between being unable pay the power bill and dying of dysentery because there's no clean water."

In the time it takes to read this sentence a child somewhere in our world will die from a preventable disease such as pneumonia or diarrhoea. We would not stand for that at home. Why should we stand for it anywhere else?

As a nation, we have so much. It's easy to forget how much. And easy to forget what it is like for many people on the planet to have little, or nothing at all.

World Vision's programs save countless lives every year, and support hundreds of thousands of the world's poorest people to improve their lives.

It is not a hand out but a hand up. The aid programs are focused on making sure there is sustainable, lasting change. The aid is effective.

We can afford to care. Australia is a lucky country. Australians have access to food, clean water, universal healthcare and education.

The Australian economy has one of the lowest debt levels in the world compared with other developed countries, combined with one of the highest incomes per person in the world. We can afford to help others in our "global family" without it detracting from our own development.

Does aid reach those in need? World Vision's aid programs have comprehensive accountability mechanisms, are well-targeted and are based on effective and cooperative partnerships with communities in need.

Aid is a proven, critical part of helping to reduce poverty and build a fairer, more prosperous and secure life for all people in the small world in which we now live. It can bring more stability to the planet than increased defence spending.

Effective humanitarian aid is one of the most cost-effective and productive investments that wealthy countries like Australia can make in the fight against global poverty and inequality.

Where we live should not determine whether we live. Where we live should perhaps determine what and how we give.

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THE OTHER DAVE
REBUILDING AN ISLAND NATION
THE RESCUE OF ROGHINI