DEN CHATTER
LIONS CLUB OF COLOMBO (HOST)

Happy New Year

MAY 2020 BE THE BEST!
Greta Thunberg

Is a Swedish environmental activist (born on 3rd January 2003) who started striking going to school urging Swedish political leaders to take immediate actions to solve the Climate Crisis.

In August 2018, at the age of 15, she protested in front of the Swedish Parliament holding up a sign saying (in Swedish) "School strike for the climate" all alone. After a few months, the other students followed her and started school climate strike movement everywhere in the world under the name "Fridays for Future".

The Greta Effect

Proving that being a child doesn’t matter to change the world, wealthy philanthropists and investors from the United States started donating almost half a million pounds supporting Extinction Rebellion and school strike groups to establish the Climate Emergency Fund thanking Greta.

In February 2019, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, stated "In the next financial period from 2021 to 2027, every fourth euro spent within the EU budget will go towards action to mitigate climate change".

In June 2019, Swedish Railways (SJ) reported that the number of train passengers had risen by 8% from 2018, reflecting the concern about CO2 emissions that is highlighted by Greta Effect.

In December 2019, the New Scientist stated the impact made by Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion with the headline: "The year the world woke up to climate change".
GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE
IN ACTION !!!
by The Leaf Girl

THE EARTH IS BURNING!

Your children will have nothing, but the ashes of this Planet which you're burning today...

96% of the forest fires are caused by HUMANS
Report by WWF

The Climate Change has been in action devastatingly all throughout 2019 covering the whole planet. We are starting 2020 with another extreme bushfire in Australia loosing 8 million hectares of forest, 25 people and millions of animals.

In 2019, there have been 4.51 million forest fires around the world. The Earth has lost millions of hectares of forest. This has becoming a major cause for Climate Change and Global Warming.

Even the Arctic was burning in 2019 and Greenland's ice sheet has lost 11 billion tons of ice within one day which was record breaking.

Alaska has experienced record-breaking temperatures of up to 32 degrees Celsius. In Alberta (Canada), fires burnt over 800,000 hectares of land in 2019. Around 9 million hectares of forest were burnt in Siberia, a bigger area than the entire country of Portugal.
SHE HUGGED ME...

by Lion Dulmi Gunatilake, Secretary - Lions Club of Colombo (Host)

It was sheer instinct when I simply opened my arms to hug her, to share her pain; a prisoned mother. She ran and hugged me tight. One mom to another, I felt her heart beating fast, I felt her sadness; she was a total stranger.

I knew that if I was a woman shunned away from home and family, left inside a prison with an infant to look after, I would welcome the comfort of a hug from a well-meaning human being. I was there along with a few other ladies from my Lions family to make those dark nights at the prison a little bit better for these mothers with infants.

For most part of the time at the prison, while the other experienced ladies gave good advice to the prison moms on making a better life for themselves, I on the other hand was just too overwhelmed to speak, and took the chance not to say a word, an instead focus on a lady who had the saddest eyes. Through my travel in Africa I learnt that you can say volumes to those that hold heavy hearts, without saying a word; with just a touch or a simple hug.

The Project

This project was conducted by the Ladies Committee of the Lions District 306A1 at a local prison in Sri Lanka. I had the rare opportunity to participate in this project that involved donating medical equipment and other daily rations to mothers and infants inside a main prison in Sri Lanka. Considering it was my birthday month, I decided to make a special donation, in this case a nebulizer for these infants. It’s when you don’t have something you value most and you start to miss it, you realise the importance of it - like breathing! It is the most important thing we take for granted as a human, and when wheezing strikes you or your children, you realise the importance of being able to breath without pain. It’s a blessing to donate in your own small way to make even a little difference in people’s lives. However, the value for volunteers is not in the monetary contribution - but in the growth that comes in multiple folds when you get on ground to ‘serve’!

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**The Surprise**

Inside the prison, the infants were given the opportunity to cradle in the arms of their mothers up to 5 years of age, and after this, children are sadly placed in orphanages separating them from their birth mothers for their own protection.

Surprisingly, the little children seemed quite happy. Some were playing with each other and some clung on to their mothers and seemed very ‘self-aware’ of the strangers around them, as with any child in an unknown environment. They hardly get visitors due to prison restrictions. The kids were jumping up and down on the new mattresses we had donated. Their old tattered thick sponge mattresses were dirty and full of holes, and were lined up alongside the wall now replaced by brand new comfy ones donated by the Lions. For the children it was like a little trampoline park; they jumped up and down with joy enjoying their new mattresses like little jack-in-the boxes! Similar to the orphanage children I work with, these kids seemed happy in the company of each other, and unaware of the stigma around living in a ‘prison’.

At first, when I walked into the prison, I had a little resentment towards the mothers who had put themselves and their children in this awful situation – They have done wrong and they need to accept the consequences. In our Asian societies they are most likely labeled as ‘bad mothers’ or ‘bad women’ and certainly not fit to be looking after children. A little deep dive into the prison mothers side of the stories left me with complete surprise and immense compassion.

**The Other Side of Dark**

If you talk to the mothers one-on-one and ask them the ‘hows’ and the ‘whys’ of their stories, we find that most of these women ended up in prison because of sheer helplessness, and not completely for a fault of their own. Most of the moms we spoke to told us stories about how they fell in to trouble when they took the blame to save their druggie husbands, or how they have no choice but to support their husband’s drug business as they have no other income to feed four children. One had lost all her wealth due to a family member stealing all her hard earned money and in that moment of weakness drugs had become her comfort, the other had a best friend who had given her bad advised saying she needed to get in to dealing illicit substances to make sure she earns well in order to give her kids a better life and collect money for her business. Others seem to think selling illegal drugs was just another method of earning quick money just to survive and not a bad thing. It seemed that if they had proper guidance and strong community support on education on living a healthy life, supported by the right support system to deal with emotional trauma to keep their minds strong and strong social service support to motivate them to rise above their failures, all of these could have been avoided.

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SHE HUGGED ME...

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Some of these ladies were well educated and with good standing – one lady, a lawyer by profession had left her career as her husband didn’t like her working. The husband had asked her to sign a bond with the bank for a loan, and one day she came home to an empty house with all her things missing, including her husband. As the legal signee of the document she and her child were put in jail for her husband’s mistake. How does one deal with such emotional trauma, let alone the physical trauma. My eyes welled up in tears trying to fathom how such mothers find the strength to be strong without any support in such situations.

Another Dimension of ‘Minimalism’

We walked along a path to where they all slept, to see their accommodation. The prison authorities had done a lot to ensure a spiritual environment, with a large Bo tree and place of worship that brought some peace, light and positivity to an uninviting environment. But as we walked along the path, the crows screeched loudly circling the skies; an eerie feeling took over the place - one that is not pleasant for a child. We entered the room where the beds were lined up, one next to each other due to space restrictions. Behind each bed, there was a small bucket. In it there was a little toothpaste, hairbrush, teacup, few clothes and few bits and bobs – their entire possessions in a bucket! both, for mother and the child.

As a mother, I wondered what pain they must feel not give the best of things to their children. Some mothers stay there for years. What a heartache it must be for a mother to not let her child see their families or allow them to play on piece of grass that can tickle their little toes. What sadness it must be to not have the ability to buy nutritious food that we ourselves once enjoyed from our mothers as children. This, only a mother will understand. A child’s cot, a playroom full of toys, baby bouncer, diaper changing table with the pretty creams and cologne bottles – all that is missing for these mothers. They simply live out of a bucket, and that gives another meaning to the word ‘minimalism’.

Showing up in Service

I am sure most of those mothers would be grateful for the donations us strangers had made, but if you can shake their hearts, it’s then that you have made a real impact! The first step of this, is for us to simply show up. We went around advising the mothers saying that there is hope, that if they put their lives straight and cook up the courage to live a righteous life, things can turn out well for them and their children. But I think what mattered to them most was that we showed up to support them, to spending time talking to them; what mattered to them is the heart to heart talks; mother-to mother, where they could relate.. where they felt that their sorrows were being heard. I hope this motivated them towards taking that small step towards living the life they deserved to have.

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The Mover and Shaker

It will not be the new mattresses, the nebulizers or baby items they will remember – it’s the warmth of the hugs, the kindness in our eyes and words that will make them feel that they will remember. The greatest gift you can give anyone is HOPE, for them to feel valued and become good citizens – Emotion is a strong mover and shaker of mountains!

As a regular volunteer at Children’s orphanages I went into this project with my heart sinking for those children, but instead came out with a heavier heart and a sea of compassion for these mothers. This is the kind of growth you get when you put yourself out there in pure Serve. Service teaches you to see the bigger picture and the realities behind the scenes. What we hear, see, and know on a regular basis in our normal lives are changed, and our beliefs questioned, with new light and lessons that are unforgettable. As for that mother in the prison who hugged me tight, she reminded me again, that loving your own people doesn’t come with any labels, that touch is the most powerful thing! It’s a blessing to show up and just see the realities in life and feel authentically for your own people. To offer ‘hope’ for those with a heavy hearted, all it requires is a heartfelt hug and to tell them that “everything is just going to be ok”...

Be strong, because things will get better. It might be stormy now, but it can’t rain forever.

- By someone wiser with a kind heart -
LIONS & LEOS OF COLOMBO (HOST)

with Santa !!!

gifted school packs to underprivileged children in the Kelaniya area.
FELIZ NAVIDAD
with Colombo (Host) Family

GENERAL MONTHLY MEETING
with Christmas !!!

On 12th December at Capri Club, Colombo
Health is the highest form of wealth

Congratulations to the Team 306 A1 that includes multiple Lions and Leos for bringing together, a successful Health is Wealth Day event. Lions Club of Colombo (Host) together with the Colombo Host Leos took part in this event to host a water station for the participants.
COMING UP IN JANUARY...

MEALS ON WHEELS
January Edition
26th Jan 2020

CLUB GENERAL MEETING
Month of January 2020
31st Jan at Lion Dr Ameer’s Residence, Colombo 04

EDITOR’S NOTE

Hi Folks,

On behalf of the family of Colombo (Host), I would like to thank you all for making a glorious 2019 with us and together we wish you a happy, healthy and a successful 2020 ahead.

Inviting you all to join our upcoming projects organized by the Lions club and Leo club.

Happy Reading Everyone!

Lion Harshi Samarasekera
Editor