

Craig Kielburger



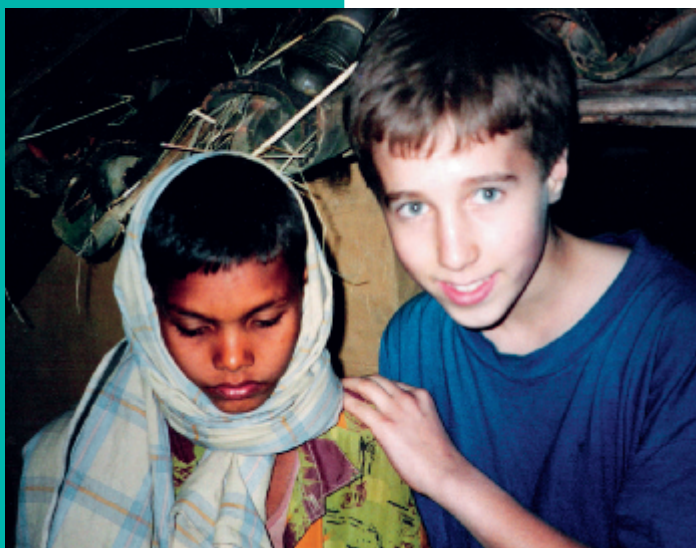
Craig Kielburger has fought for years to free children from poverty and other violations of the rights of the child. But he also wants to empower children to feel that they can contribute to a better world for children. Craig founded Free The Children (FTC) in 1995, when he was 12. Since then, FTC has built more than 400 schools for 35,000 pupils in 21 countries, and sent 200,000 packages with materials for healthcare and schools, as well as medical equipment worth 9 million US dollars. FTC has given gifts of cows, goats, sewing machines or land to 20,000 women, so that they can earn money and their children don't have to work. FTC has also provided 123,000 people with clean water. The children themselves have paid for most of this. Over 500,000 children and young people in 23 countries have learned, through FTC, to help other children, and that they have the right and the power to demand that the rights of the child are respected.



On the evening of April 16th, 1995, the Pakistani boy Iqbal Masih, who fights against child labour, is out on a bike with two relatives. Iqbal sits at the front of the bike. Suddenly there is a shot. And another. Iqbal lies dead on the ground. The message of the death of this young former debt slave spreads all over the world ...



... In Toronto, Canada, 12-year-old Craig Kielburger reaches for the newspaper on the breakfast table. He has no idea that today's paper contains something which will change his life forever ...



“At first I was just going to flick through to the cartoon strips, but I happened to see a headline on the front page about a 12-year-old child worker who had been killed,” says Craig, who is now 22.

The spoon in his cereal and milk was left untouched while Craig read the whole article.

“At first, everything that happened to Iqbal seemed unreal to me. I had never heard of child labour or debt slavery, and I got really upset.

I asked my parents if it was

really true. ‘Read up on it’, they answered. I went to the library and contacted

different organizations that work for human rights, and soon I had found out more.”

Free The Children

“After a week, I asked my teacher if I could tell the class something. ‘Go ahead’, he answered. Then I told them about child labour and about Iqbal.

After school I called my classmates. Twenty of us met at my house. We held an



Craig Kielburger, 22

Started to fight for children: When I was 12 years old.

Founded: Free The Children in 1995.

Wants to: Free children from poverty and violations of the Rights of the Child.

Also wants to: Free children from feeling disempowered and from only thinking about themselves.

Likes: Stories where children’s power gives adults no choice but to listen.

Best present: Street child Joao’s torn football top.

Is certain: That children have power, especially together!

exhibition, and decided to start Free The Children. We held a garage sale and sold juice and other things to raise money for the fight against child labour. That was how it all started.

One of the people I had contacted to find out more said that if I really wanted to know more about the lives of these children, I had to visit them.”

Craig couldn’t stop thinking about a trip. But his mother said:

“No way, it’s out of the question.”

But when a 25-year-old promised to take care of

Free from slavery

Craig together with a carpet weaver child in India, who he helped to set free from slavery.

Craig on a 7-week trip to India, Pakistan, Nepal and Thailand, and when Craig’s parents saw that the journey was well planned, they gave in. He was going on the trip!

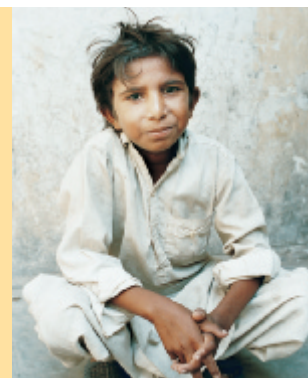
“Since then, I look at my life into two parts – ‘before Asia’ and ‘after Asia’”, says Craig.

Children set free

During his trip, Craig met a boy who had been seriously injured by an explosion in a firework factory, where he carried out dangerous work without protection. He also met a little girl who worked breaking up old syringes without any protection. She climbed over them with bare feet.

“She had no idea about AIDS or that the syringes could spread disease.”

The children working as brick-makers got a good laugh when Craig tried without success to make bricks



Iqbal’s voice reached the four corners of the world

Craig’s role model Iqbal, was posthumously (after his death) awarded the first World Children’s Prize in the year 2000. Since then, the jury’s prize has carried an extra name in his memory. Iqbal was a debt slave in a rug factory, and fought for children’s rights. Read more about Iqbal at www.childrensworld.org





out of clay. They all belonged to debt slave families, and had to start work early every morning.

In India, Craig also got to help set debt slave children free, who had been ‘owned’ by a very cruel man.

“I’ll never forget them. 12-year-old Nageshwer told me that he got the burns on his leg as punishment for trying to help his brother escape. And Mohan, 9, told me that he and the other 20 children at the rug factory saw two children being beaten to death with bamboo canes and knives, after having been caught trying to run away from the factory. The owner told the boys’ parents that they had run away.”

PM gives in

Around the same time as Craig went off on his travels, the Prime Minister of Canada also went on a trip to Asia with some Canadian businessmen. The purpose of their trip was to make some business deals.

“I got a fax in India, saying that the Prime Minister was on his way there. I wondered if he was planning to take up the issue of child labour, and I sent him a fax asking him if he would like to meet with me.

The answer was “No!”. The Prime Minister had not planned to talk about child labour in the countries he was visiting, even though those very countries were among those with the most child labour. And he certainly did not have time for a little boy.

The Prime Minister came to regret that decision. Craig called a press conference. He had Nageshwer and Mohan by his side, who he had helped to set free. Both of their stories, and Craig himself, became big news at home in Canada.

“It is the Prime Minister’s moral responsibility to take up the issue of child labour when he meets India’s Prime Minister,” said Craig.

The Prime Minister’s advisors realised that they couldn’t keep ignoring this boy, and all of a sudden, the Prime Minister had time for Craig. It all ended with the Canadian Prime Minister taking up the issue of child labour with every Prime Minister he met during his trip.

So when the decision was made that Canada was to start taking the rights of the child into consideration in its trading relations with other countries, it was a victory for Craig and Free The Children.



Craig and the Prime Minister

When the newspapers in Canada wrote about Craig’s fight against child labour, the then Prime Minister agreed to meet with him.



Demonstration in India

Craig with Indian child labourers, in a demonstration against hazardous child labour.

Favourite present

Craig has visited many countries to meet children who are treated badly and politicians. In Brazil, one of the people he met was Joao, one of the many children who live on the street. He told Craig all about how his parents used to beat him, and how he was always scared of the police, who persecuted and even killed street children. He slept with cardboard boxes as his mattress and blanket. When Craig said that he had to go home to Canada, Joao said:

“Then I’ll walk there and visit you!”

When he realised that it wasn’t possible to walk there, he wanted to give his

friend a farewell present. He took off the finest thing he owned, an old worn out football top in the colours of his favourite team, and handed it to Craig.

“That was the best present I’ve ever received. First I thought, ‘but he needs his top to keep him from freezing at night’. But then I realised that it meant a lot to him, who had nothing, to be able to give me a present.”

Craig took off his own top and the two boys swapped t-shirts, like after a football match.

Suspicious

Many adults didn’t believe that it was Craig’s own ideas and will that made him fight

In Brazil

In Brazil, some of the children Craig met lived on the street or worked on a sisal plantation.

for the rights of the child. They couldn't believe that a child could have so much power.

"Adults often asked me, 'Who is behind all this? Who is pushing you?' But why are adults so surprised when children care about these terrible things that happen in society? They underestimate children's abilities," says Craig.

"Children simply can't understand that the world's adults can manage to send a man to the moon and to create nuclear weapons, but can't manage to give all the children in the world enough to eat."

Lots of grown-ups were interested in Craig and tried to get at him. One day, a phone call came from a newspaper in Germany and his mum answered.

"Isn't it true that he is really 19 years old, and not 12?"



was the question.

"Of course he's 12. I should know, I'm his mum!"

A Canadian newspaper claimed that Craig and his family had kept a large sum of money, even though Craig had given the money to an Indian organization which fights against child labour, and 2000 people had seen him do it!

Children have power!

Craig and Free The Children want children to understand that they can make their voices heard, and that grown-ups must listen.

"Children have power, if they realise it, and really can change things," Craig is convinced. And they are much stronger together than alone. ➔

Listen to the children!

Craig tells of children and young people who demand that people listen to them:

"In Sierra Leone, children created their own radio programme for peace. In Kenya, young people put on theatre productions to educate people about AIDS. In Senegal, the largest workers' union is made up of children. In Brazil, the street children have formed their own organization. In the USA, young people sent back their Nike shoes to the company's CEO, in protest against the working conditions of the people who made the shoes."



Craig's favourite story about the power of children – 1

The boy who made tuna fish 'Dolphin-free'

A 12-year-old boy in the USA watched a Greenpeace film. It showed how dolphins get trapped in nets meant for tuna fish, and die. The boy found out the home addresses of all the people in the company's board of directors, and got hold of lots of postcards with pictures of dolphins on them. Then he told his class, and then the whole school, about what he had learned. All the pupils agreed to send a postcard to one of the

directors at least once a week. They wrote things like 'Why do you kill dolphins?' and 'Dolphins are cute!' and 'Dolphins are cleverer than you!'

The boy travelled from school to school with the same message, and the directors of the company got more and more postcards through their letterboxes. In the end, they invited the boy to a board meeting, and asked him what he wanted. The boy replied that he want-

ed a promise that the company would not kill one single dolphin just so that they could catch tuna fish.

The directors promised, and today most tins of tuna carry a mark which says: 'Dolphin safe tuna!'



Craig together with his friends from FTC.

When Craig visited schools, he always said to the pupils who listened to him, “All of you who are interested in the rights of the child, stand up!” Everyone would stand up. Then he would say, “All of you who are interested in the environment, stand up!” Everyone would stand up. Then Craig would ask, “Do you have an organization for the rights of the child, or for the environment, in your school?” Almost everywhere, the answer he got was “No!” Then Craig would choose a girl and a boy and say, “Since you’re all interested in these questions, you can sign up with these two and start an organization. The most important thing, once you have found an issue you care about, is first to find out lots about it. Then you can tell more people about it, and the adults can’t just ignore you.”

10 years later

10 years have now passed since Craig caught sight of Iqbal in the morning newspaper.

“Helping others is extraordinarily empowering for children. I and my older brother Marc have written the book *Me to We*. Become happy through helping others. It’s not a question of charity, where we just send money. We’re not like that. We want to change how people think, and we want them to take responsibility for how they live their lives. And instead of thinking about *Me*, think about *We*,” explains Craig.

If Free The Children started out with the intention of freeing children from child



labour and poverty, the idea has grown for Craig, to also mean freeing children in Canada and other rich countries from always needing to think about themselves.

“We do that through giving them a chance to make a difference. We help them to understand how they can think about others in their daily lives, by choosing goods which are produced

under fair conditions, and how they, when they get to vote, can help to increase Canada’s foreign aid to 0.7% of the country’s GNP, a goal which was set by the UN some 35 years ago. Today, Canada’s foreign aid amounts to only 0.27% of its GNP**.

Every year, through Free The Children, tens of thousands of pupils in the

Toronto area learn about working for the best of others, and about leadership.

FTC in the world

Of course, FTC’s purpose is also to help vulnerable children all over the world, and change their lives.

“Prevention is the key,” says Craig. “We have chosen to put our efforts into schools and health clinics.”

Craig’s favourite story about the power of children – 2

The girl who made school lunches environmentally friendly

A 12-year-old girl in the USA had done a project on the environment in school, all about the things that affect the ozone layer. She discovered that polystyrene contributed to damaging the environment. She got a good grade for her project, but became very upset when she realised that the lunchboxes in the school dining hall were made of polystyrene. She stood up on a table in the

dining hall and managed to get her schoolmates to join her in boycotting school lunches until they stopped using polystyrene boxes.

The girl found out the name of the company which supplied the lunchboxes full of food to the school. The boss of the company invited the girl in. She said that the pupils in her school would not eat in the school dining hall until the food there was served

on ceramic plates or plates made from recycled paper. The company gave in.





Mud fight for school

Craig and some other young Canadians went to Nicaragua to build a school together with the local people. It was a messy job, even without the mud fight...

CRAIGS ADVICE



It is children that raise the money, but FTC has also received help from, among others, Oprah Winfrey's Angel Network, which pays for 50 FTC schools in different parts of the world. Funds are raised in every way possible, for example with 'ugly tie competitions' and 'guess the age of your teacher contests'. We have 'brick by brick' campaigns, in order

to raise 6000 dollars to be able to build a school in one of 21 countries in Asia, Africa and South America. For every 100 dollars that a school raises, they put up a painted brick in a 'brick' wall, until the wall is complete. Sometimes they can challenge companies and others to contribute the same amount that they raise themselves.

Further on in the magazine, you can read about children in India, Sierra Leone and Ecuador who have been able to start school and have a better life thanks to Free The Children. 🌐

**GNP, Gross National Product = the value of the products and services which are produced in a country.



Craig together with pupils from a Toronto school which helped Free The Children raise enough money to send medical equipment worth more than 1 million US dollars to the countries that were hit by the giant Tsunami wave.

“Free The Children wants children all over the world to realise that:

- They have a right to make their voice heard!
- They have rights!
- They can achieve positive change!
- They can influence the lives of other children!
- Their views are important!”



Youth in Action speak



“Craig’s book changed my life”

“I was used to seeing commercials on TV that showed suffering children, but I felt too young to do anything about it. When I read Craig’s book, I realised for the first time that young people can make a difference in the world.”

I knew that I too was ready to make a difference. For many years now, I have been volunteering at the FTC office, and helping to build schools in Nicaragua and Ecuador. Two years ago I met with child labourers, child soldiers, and children working in brothels in Sri Lanka. I also met with adults who could make a difference in the lives of those children. Every day was a struggle to get those adults to take me seriously.”

Cheryl Perera, 19, Canada

I can!

“I remember coming to my first FTC meeting and realising that I am not the only child on the planet who reads the newspaper and actually cares! I had always thought that I would have to be a politician to change the world. But I learned that I can do things now and I can do them my way.”

Madeleine Northcote, 16, Canada



Learned to do

“When I was growing up, people around me seemed to live in a small world. FTC has shown me a bigger picture of the world. I’ve learned to love and accept everybody and to do the most I can in the position I am in to help others.”

Sharon Ng, 16, Canada



My project!

“Working with FTC is not something that has been forced on me or is part of my school curriculum. It is my project and my passion. It is something that will always stay with me.”

Jason Apostol, 17, Canada



Two girls’ school

“I began working with FTC when I was 9 years old. The older kids taught me a lot about children’s rights, child labour and poverty. The more I found out, the more I wanted to make a difference.”

When I was thirteen, I had my Baht Mitzvah, a Jewish ceremony. Instead of gifts I asked for money to build a school in Ecuador. When I went to the FTC I was told about a family who had lost a daughter who was my age. Her dream had been to build a school. At her funeral, the family asked for money instead of flowers, and like me they had a lot, but not enough. We put our money together and were able to build the Emma Johnson School in the mountains of Ecuador. Seeing the school was amazing. I was so proud!”

Jordana Weiss, 15, Canada

Look away!



“I grew up in Mexico. When I was 8 years old, I remember seeing a boy sleeping on the pavement. The driver told me to look away. I never talked about poverty. I just looked away, because that is what people told me to do. I don’t remember anyone saying that we could change it.”

When I was 11 we moved to Toronto in Canada. When I met the children at FTC I realised that poverty did not have to exist and that not only the politicians but also we children could make a difference.”

Ale Romo, 18, Canada





Nandini

Twelve-year-old Nandini lives in Thiruvananthapuram in India. When her mother and aunt became ill her father borrowed money to buy medicine. Now Nandini is worried about what could happen if her family can't pay back the loan.

became a debt slave



Nandini Ponnusamy, 13

- Loves:** My family.
- Likes:** Cycling and running fast!
- Doesn't want to:** Work.
- Looks up to:** My mum.
- Wants to be:** A fair and good police officer.

Nandini has to take two days a week off school to take care of her mother who is ill. She knows that the family is very poor and that her father, who is a farm worker, only earns 250 rupees (5,50 US dollar) a month. Now he has borrowed 5300 rupees from a rich man in the village. How will they ever pay it back?

One day the rich man comes to their house. He is very angry and shouts that he wants his money.

“Or else you'll have to send your daughter to work

This is how Nandini worked.

the debt off in my workshop.”

That night Nandini's parents explain that she has to leave school and start working the very next day. First she gets angry, then she starts to cry. Her mother and father cry too and ask her to forgive them.

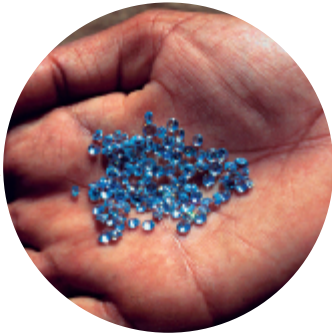
Beaten with a stick

In a small dark room 20

workers sit bent over their gem cutting machines. Nandini is the youngest and the grown-ups feel sorry for her. They show her how to do the job. The gem cutting machines have a metal disc that spins round very fast. Nandini uses it to cut and polish tiny stones. Sometimes she makes a mistake, and her hand slips and gets



The girl working at the gem cutting machine does the same thing Nandini did as a debt slave.



Slave-cut stones

Tens of thousands of children work in the gem cutting industry in India. Several thousand of them are debt slaves. They cut and polish synthetic gems, imitations of precious stones like diamonds and rubies. The stones are used in jewellery which is sold in India, the USA and Europe.

feet are swollen. The acid which is used to polish the stones sometimes drips onto her skin and burns a hole. Sometimes Nandini dreams of escaping, but then what would become of her family?

Nandini earns 25 rupees a day. The owner keeps the money as payment of the loan. But after a year, the debt hasn't gone down, it has gone up. The debt grows because the interest is so high. Nandini realises she is going to be a debt slave for the rest of her life.

Saved by a cow

One day Free The Children comes to visit and gets to hear about the family's problems. They ask Nandini's mother what kind of help she needs.

"I'd really like to have a

cow," she answers. She knows that Free The Children have given cows to other women in the village. The cow produces both milk and calves which can be sold to increase the family's income.

In just two months Nandini's mother manages to sell so much of the cow's milk that she can pay off the family's debt to the workshop owner. Nandini is free

and can start school again.

"That was the happiest day of my life," Nandini says.

Instead of a plate of rice a day, the family can now eat three proper meals every day. Nandini's mother gets better and her confidence grows. To everyone's surprise, she decides to run for election to the village council and wins! Nandini's father becomes an assistant



hurt. Spoiled stones have to be thrown away and that makes the owner angry. He beats Nandini every day, with his fists or with a wooden stick.

Nandini cuts and polishes 50 stones a day, seven days a week, from eight in the morning until eight at night. Her eyes hurt, she has a headache and her legs and



Jasmine in her hair

In Southern India the girls almost always wear flowers in their hair, and Nandini's village is especially famous for its beautiful jasmine flowers.



Knowledge is power!

Free The Children believes that education is the best way to fight poverty and child labour. In Nandini's village they have opened a school for the younger children. The older children go by bus to a state school in the nearest town, but in the evenings they get extra tuition and help with their homework in the village school.



On the way to school again, after a year as a debt slave.

to another female politician. Suddenly both parents have well-paid jobs.

Nandini's mother also starts a self-help group with other women in the village. They teach in the Free The Children school in the village and help each other to start small businesses.

"I am so proud of my mum," says Nandini. "Before, she was sick and never left the house. Now she's a teacher, a politician and a business woman!"

Nandini isn't angry with

her parents any more.

"I know it wasn't their fault. I blame the rich man, but also the landowners who didn't pay my father a wage he could live on."

Damaged eyes

Nandini's eyes still hurt in strong sunlight. They may never fully recover. With help from Free The Children, she and other children in the village have started a club to try to fight child labour.

"We children don't get any

help, neither from the government nor from the police. That's why we have to support each other," Nandini says, "and why I want to be a fair and good police officer when I grow up."

"I'll make sure that everyone obeys the law, that there are no child slaves or child workers, and that all children get an education." 🌐

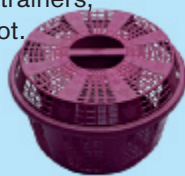


TEXT: CARMILLA FLOYD PHOTO: KIM NAYLOR

Fastest in the village!

Nandini is good at running and has won lots of races in the village! Her house is full of her prizes – cooking utensils and crockery. But Nandini can't join the school athletics team. "Then you have to buy trainers," she says. "I run barefoot. I think it's unfair."

Nandini's prizes.



"I am proud of my mum!"



The cow that helps Nandini. ➔



A cow changed our

In one year, a cow from Free The Children has changed Nandini's life. Today the family can thank their kind cow for all of this:



Milk

The cow produces seven litres of milk a day. Half is sold to a man who buys up milk to sell it on, and the family uses the rest.



Goats

With money from selling milk and calves, the family have bought goats, who produce milk and whose dung can be used as fuel or fertiliser.

Cow poo!

Cow dung is dried and used as fuel for cooking and as fertiliser.



Better food

Before, Nandini was always hungry. In those days she only ate one plate of rice a day. Now the whole family have tasty and healthy food with lots of vegetables, three times a day!



Animals bring in money

Many children in the world are forced to work and can't go to school because their families are poor. Free The Children gives poor families a cow, goat or pig, better farming equipment, or a sewing machine. When the families start to do better the children don't have to work any more and can go to school. So far Free The Children has helped over 20,000 people in Asia, Latin America and Africa in this way.

lives!



Calves

So far the cow has had two calves, and both of them have been sold.



ELECTRICITY

One of the first things the family did with the cow money was to install electricity. South India can get hot – over 50 degrees Celsius – so it's good to have a ceiling fan! The TV and the gem cutting machine also run on electricity.



Gem cutting machine

Bought with the money from selling the calves. Now Nandini's mum has her own business and works from home, cutting and polishing stones and selling them. She earns money directly, instead of working in a workshop for low pay.

Education

"Now I can concentrate more on school and get good grades," says Nandini. "I also have two school uniforms, so I don't have to spend all my time washing!"



TV

Nandini's favourite programme is a drama series about a female singer.

"It's funny and exciting.

The woman who is the main character is brave and strong and manages to solve every problem in her family and her career."



Clothes

"In the old days I only had worn out and torn clothes," Nandini says.

"Now I've got more to choose from, and nice clothes for special occasions."



TEXT: CARMILLA FLOYD PHOTO: KIM NAYLOR



Roof and walls

The house used to leak during the rainy season, but now the family have put on a new roof, fixed cracks in the walls and repainted.

Club against child labour

Free The Children helps children to start clubs, where they can have fun together while also fighting child labour. Often the club members walk around their local area and try to persuade parents to send their children to school instead of letting them work. Here, a children's club meets on a roof.



Slave owner beat Naushath



Naushath worked in a workshop just like this when he was 11.



Naushath Babu, 13

Lives in: Tiruchirappalli, India.

Likes: School, playing cricket and computer games.

Heroes: Sachin, the cricket star.

Wants to be: A building engineer and a professional cricket player.

Looks up to: His mum.

When Naushath was 11 years old he had to stop school and start work in a gold workshop. The owner refused to let him see his parents and beat him every day for a whole year.

It all started when Naushath's father borrowed money from a rich man to pay for medicine for Naushath's grandmother. The family was very poor, and couldn't pay back the loan in time. Then the rich man said that Naushath had to move into the gold workshop and work the debt off.

"Can't he come home in the evenings?" his mother begged. She was on the verge of tears but the workshop owner refused.

"Blame yourselves for not paying up," he said.

That was the last time

Naushath saw his parents for over a year.

34 cents a day

Naushath learned to treat gold jewellery so that it becomes shiny and its yellow gold colour is brought out. He spent every day dipping jewellery in strong chemicals, like sulphuric acid and cyanide, and then polished it with sharp tools. He began to lose the feeling in his fingertips and often got cuts. Naushath worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week. The pay, which was about 105 rupees (2,40 US dollar)



Gold jewellery is more popular in India than anywhere else in the world. A fifth of the world's gold is bought and worn by Indians.





Wants to be a cricketer

Naushath wants to be a professional cricketer and earn lots of money. Then he will be able to afford to train as an engineer.



When it's too cramped in the house Naushath does his homework on the roof.

a week, was kept by the owner as payment of the debt. But since the interest on his parents' loan was so high, their debt got bigger instead of decreasing.

The owner drank alcohol at night and that made him violent. He beat Naushath every night, with belts, shoes, chairs and bottles. He used Naushath as a football and kicked him in to the walls. Naushath often cried at night, when he tried to fall asleep on the floor. The workshop felt like a prison. But one night he dreamt that he ate breakfast with his family and went to school. The dream gave him new hope of one day being free.

Locked up against the law!

Finally one of Naushath's relatives contacted Free The Children. When they found out that Naushath had been held prisoner for a year they started a campaign, along with their local partner organization, to have Naushath set free. A lawyer contacted local politicians and the workshop owner was taken to court. He was ordered to release Naushath. Finally he was free!

His parents hardly recognised their own son. He was terribly thin and dirty, and



Children who work in the gold workshops get ill because of all the strong chemicals.

had sores and scars all over his body. Free The Children helped Naushath to get over his experiences and start school again. Naushath's mother was given a sewing machine and training in finances and tailoring. She started her own tailoring business and also got a job at a printing press. In a short time the family's income rose from 250 rupees a month to 3,000.

"I really admire my mum," says Naushath. She's like a new person, and has helped me so much. We have moved to a new house and we eat much better now. But without help from Free The Children I would have been a debt slave for the rest of my life." 🌐

Listen to Naushath at www.childrensworld.org



Naushath lives with 13 people in one room, and his mum supports them all!

Here the family have gathered to watch TV. "If it was up to me, I'd put toilets in every house, plant trees, and make the air cleaner," says Naushath.



Mary

hid in the forest

When Mary was nine her father, big brother and little sister were killed in Sierra Leone's civil war. She hid from the rebels in the forest and couldn't go to school for over four years. When the war was over, the rebels had destroyed her school.

"But one day, Free The Children started to rebuild the school. Finally I can learn things. I love school and want to be a doctor or a lawyer and fight for children's rights when I grow up," says Mary.

It's a hot afternoon and Mary is clearing away branches in the cassava field with her machete knife. Then she bends down and digs for cassava in the ground. She puts one after another in her brown sack.

Mary has been in school all day, and she hasn't eaten since early this morning. Now and again she looks around, worried. She doesn't like being out here in the forest. During the war Mary often had to hide here to escape the rebels. When she's in the forest all the horrible memories come flooding back.



"It feels as though someone is watching me all the time. As though the rebels could jump out of the bushes and kill me any minute. I also think a lot about how they killed dad. Sometimes I even think I can hear my

brother calling for help, just like he did that night when the rebels took him away..."

Brother and sister killed

That night, Mary was woken by the sound of shouting and gunfire. The rebels were

attacking her village.

"When we came out of our house it was chaos, people were running around in panic. We ran as fast as we could straight into the forest and hid. First I thought we were all together, but then I



Mary clears the way...

heard my brother shout “Mary help me, help me! They’re taking me!” He had been behind us and there was nothing I could do. I never saw him again. Later we heard that all the children who had been kidnapped that night were killed. After the attack we hid in the forest, but the very next night the rebels found us. My little sister was left behind when everybody fled in panic. They killed her too. She was only six.

“I still feel awful that I couldn’t save my brother and sister. But there was nothing I could do. I was only nine years old after all.”

Deathly silence in the forest

Again and again Mary had to run away to the forest. The longest time she spent there was two and half months.

“It was the rainy season



...to get at the cassava

and lots of people got ill with malaria. We tried to shelter under big trees. The whole time I thought about my brother and sister, and cried a lot. At night we looked for cassava. We ate it raw so that the rebels wouldn’t see cooking fires and find our hiding place. Even though we were hungry and sick, the worst thing was the fear and the silence. Nobody said a word. Mothers breastfed their babies all the time so that they wouldn’t cry. Some people had chickens with them, but if they started to cluck they were killed straight away. It was as if even the birds had stopped singing. Everything was deathly silent.”

School after four years

After an hour, Mary has gathered enough cassava. She lifts the heavy sack onto



Mary Smart, 14

Lives: In Moyamba, Sierra Leone.

Loves: Being with friends in school.

Hates: War and fighting.

Worst thing that’s happened: When dad, my big brother and my little sister were killed.

Best thing that’s happened: When I got a pair of blue sandals from a friend.

Want to be: A doctor or a lawyer.

Dream: That there will never again be war in Sierra Leone and that all children can go to school.





Loads of snakes

Apart from all the terrible memories, there are lots of dangerous snakes in the forests where Mary lives.

"There are cobras and pythons. I've killed over twenty small snakes with my knife while working in the forest. But when the really big ones come I run for my life. If they get hold of you, you haven't a chance! Last week a huge snake slithered into a house in the neighbouring village and killed a small child," says Mary.

Children know best

"I know that children in Canada have collected money for Free The Children so that they could rebuild our school. They've also sent us skipping ropes, balls and other things. I think it's important that children help other children. I believe children can sometimes help children better than adults can, since children know what children need," says Mary.

Mary plays with her cousins.



her head and hurries home-wards. She wants to get out of the forest as fast as possible.

After dinner Mary goes inside, lights the paraffin lamp and starts her homework. Since she has a whole day at school first, then works in the cassava field in the afternoon, she never gets round to studying until late evening. Often she sits up until one in the morning.

"I love school. During the war I couldn't go to school for over four years. I wanted to go back so much, but I never thought I'd be able to. Now I'm giving it my all. I want to be a doctor or a lawyer and fight for children's rights when I grow up, so I have to study hard."

Free The Children

"When the war ended our school was totally destroyed. The roof was gone and there wasn't a single window left. All the benches and books had either been stolen or burned. It felt like our whole future had been destroyed. But one day Free

War against children

Sierra Leone's civil war took place between 1991 and 2002, and was very brutal. The war was fought mainly between the rebel movement, RUF, and Sierra Leone's government and army. 200 000 people were killed and more than two million lost their homes. 10 000 children were kidnapped. They were forced to become soldiers and to kill people, sometimes even their own

families. The soldiers used girls as "wives". All sides in the war used children as soldiers and violated the rights of the child. Children couldn't go to school since they and their teachers had fled to the forests. When the war ended almost all the schools in the country had been destroyed, and all school materials had been stolen.



New hairstyle every week

"On Sunday afternoons my cousins and I braid each other's hair. It takes two hours to do a hairstyle. I usually change style every week, and there are as many possibilities as you can think of. In Sierra Leone it's usually only girls who braid their hair. Some boys who have seen American films braid their hair too, but I think it looks better when boys shave their hair off," says Mary.





Free The Children is committed to girls

“In Sierra Leone lots of people say that school is something for boys, not girls. Girls should stay at home and cook and look after younger siblings. That’s totally wrong! We have the same right to go to

school as the boys! My school’s just for girls, and by rebuilding it Free The Children has helped us get a better chance in life,” says Mary.



- 1** Adama Kallon, 12
- 2** Fatmata Bolima, 12
- 3** Jenneh Cole, 12
- 4** Mariama Kallon, 12

Cool hairstyles at Mary’s school! ➔



The diamond war

Sierra Leone is possibly the most diamond-rich country in the world, and it was because of the diamonds that the civil war could go on so long. The money the RUF rebels got from diamond smuggling helped them to buy weapons and keep fighting for over ten years. The rebels kidnapped children and forced them to carry out the dangerous work down the mines. It is thought that Sierra Leone lost 200 million dollars of income because of diamond smuggling every year for almost the whole length of the war. From 2000 till 2003 the UN didn't allow trade in Sierra Leonean diamonds unless they could be shown to be legal. The UN wanted to stop the rebels from continuing the war with help from "blood diamonds".

School for girls

"The children suffered the most in the war, and we do what we can so that they can have a good future. We believe that education is the best way for the children to have a good life. Free The Children repairs schools that were destroyed during the war and sometimes we build new ones. When we can, we pay for school fees, uniforms and materials. Right now we're helping a thousand children to go to school. We put special effort into getting girls into school since it's always been harder for them to get an education here. Lots of families have chosen, and still choose, to send only the boys to school while the girls stay at home and help out. It shouldn't be like that! Girls should have the same opportunity as boys to have a good future," says Sister Clare Stanley, Free The Children in Sierra Leone.



Mary wants a diamond ring

"I've never seen a diamond in real life, only in pictures. They're beautiful and I'd love to have a diamond ring! I make my own jewellery with beads. This waistband took a whole day to make. I bought the beads at the market for 1000 leones (50 US cents). I got the money together by gathering wood in the forest and selling it," says Mary.



Goats for school

Free The Children has a programme for mums who let their children go to school. They get two goats so that they can start earning money by rearing goats. The families don't need to send their children out to work any more, and can let them go to school instead.



5 Nyallo Amara, 13



6 Magdaline Goba, 13

I was a soldier

“I was kidnapped by the rebels along with lots of other children. They took us to a camp deep in the forest. I was only ten years old then.

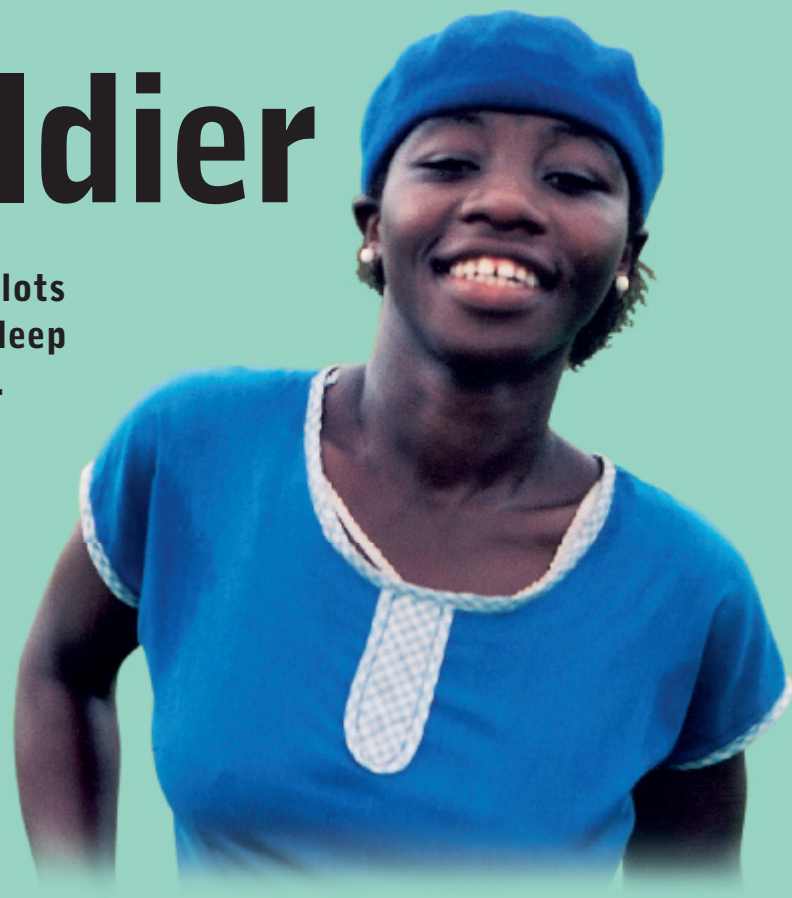
Every morning before sunrise, and before we got anything to eat, the training began. I had to learn to shoot, and how to kill with different sorts of knives. Since we slept so little and got hardly any food I was always tired and hungry. But I never dared to say. If you let it show that you were tired, hungry or sad you could be killed straight away.

“Almost every night the rebels burned down houses and killed people. They forced the boys to take drugs and then kill people. I carried weapons and ammunition but luckily I never had to kill anyone. One night I got shrapnel in my stomach.

I was sad, but didn't dare to show it in case I got killed.

“After having been kidnapped for two months I'd had enough. I was supposed to be fetching water when I noticed the guard was looking away. I ran as fast as I could and hid in the bushes. The guard went crazy and started shooting at the bushes and trees and shouting that he was going to kill me.

“When I'm alone I think a lot about what has happened and I have nightmares. But when I'm in school I forget all the bad stuff.” 🌐



Juliana Pyne, 15

Loves: Being able to go to school.

Hates: When adults treat children badly.

Worst thing that's happened: That mum was killed in the war, and that I was abused by grown men.

Best thing that's happened: When I got to start school again.

Wants to be: A doctor.

Dream: To get to travel and see other countries.



Juliana works after school and at the weekends to get money for food and school fees. Here, she helps a neighbour to clean and hull rice. She earns 2000 leones

(1 US dollar) for each 50 kilo sack. Sometimes she washes clothes or sells fish at the market.

School at heart of village



High up in the mountains, south of the equator and right in the middle of Ecuador is a little village called San Pablo de Pulungí. It lies at the foot of the snow-clad slopes of the volcano Chimborazo, and is home to the Puruhae native people. With help from Free The Children, the people in the village have built a school for their children.

Potatoes and vegetables have been grown in the village for a long time, both in the valley and on the steep mountainsides. The native people have kept pigs, guinea pigs, sheep and a few cows that have grazed on the thin grass. It's a tough life, and many people have had to move away to find jobs in the nearest town.

There was no school either. Even though the law in Ecuador says that all children have to go to school for at least six years, it simply isn't possible for many children.

Children come first

But a few years ago, two men came to see how life was for the native people in the mountains. They wanted to know what the people needed and what environmental problems affected the area.

"The earth is blowing away and it's hard to get a good harvest, and there's less and less water coming from the glacier. But the most important thing is the children," said the village inhabitants, "we have to do something for their future." Everyone agreed to try to find money to build a school. And it happened! One of

the men was from Canada and knew about Free The Children, which supports projects that make it possible for children to go to school. The building materials arrived in the village and everybody helped to build the school. Since then Free The Children has built more than 20 schools in different Puruhae villages around Chimborazo.

Teachers don't hit pupils

Now people have started moving back to San Pablo. Everyone wants their children to go to this school! Here the children learn about democracy and the rights of the child, and they get to elect a student coun-

cil. They can learn Quechua, Spanish and English. They learn to play traditional instruments and sing folk songs. They learn how to grow organic crops and plant trees. They learn how to use computers. And last but not least, the teachers don't hit the pupils!

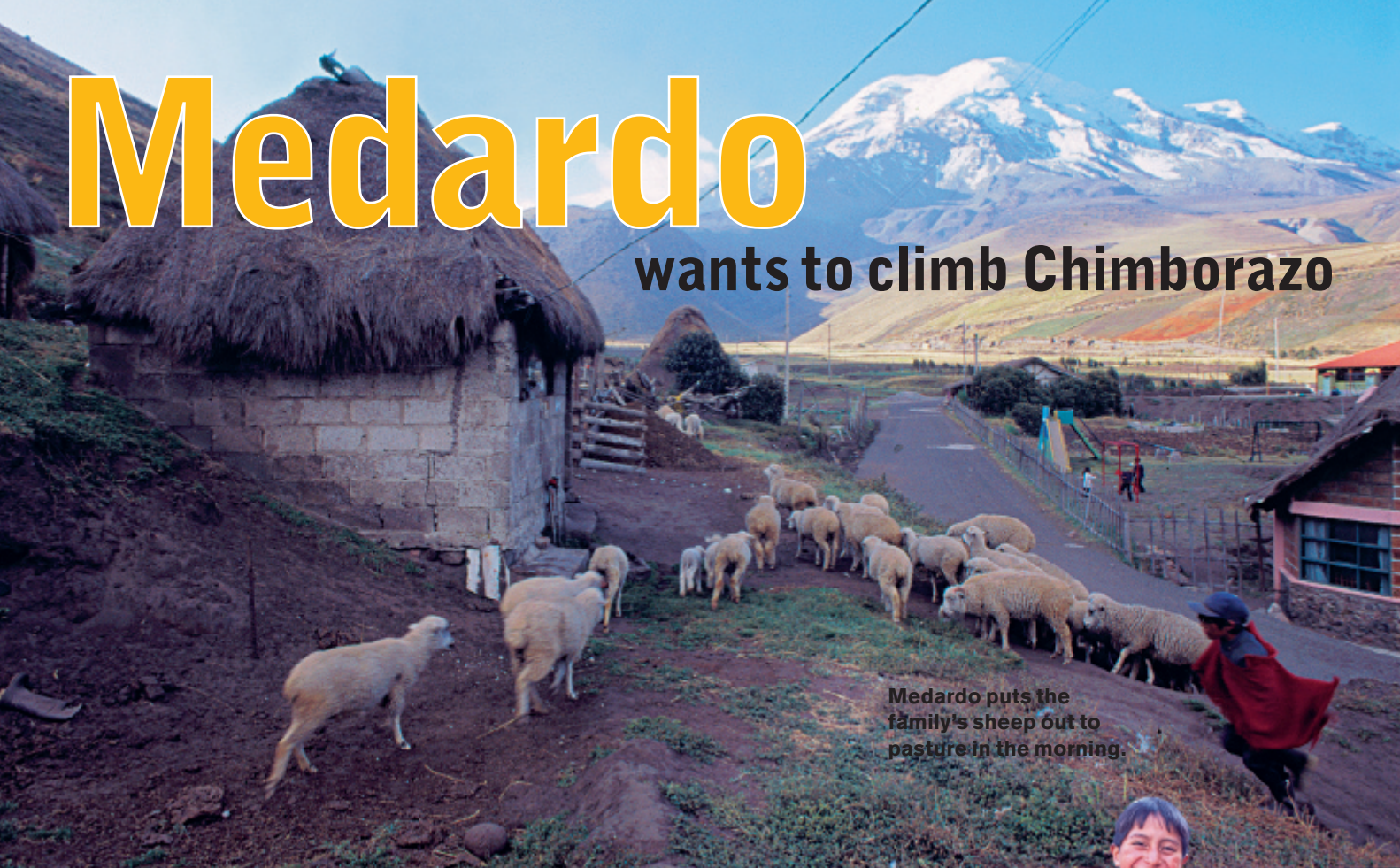
However, Ecuador is a country where the native people rarely have it easy. Often their children have to give up school because parents can't afford to let them study. Books, school uniforms and perhaps even transport to school cost too much. But in the school in San Pablo, and the other schools built by Free The Children, everything is free, even lunch and snacks. 🌍

All of the school's children, teachers and parents.



Medardo

wants to climb Chimborazo



Medardo puts the family's sheep out to pasture in the morning.

It's cold at night in the village of San Pablo in Ecuador. Medardo sleeps with his clothes on to keep warm and so that he won't need any time to get dressed in the morning. Every morning before he leaves for school, which he loves, he helps his mum with the sheep and pigs.

As soon as Medardo opens the door he can see Mount Chimborazo. He lives with his mum Maria Rosa and their two dogs, Nena and Brando. Medardo's older brother Ramiro works in town and his dad left the family a couple of months ago.

"It really hurt when I heard mum and dad arguing. I wanted to close my eyes and cover my ears and pretend it was just a bad dream. But it wasn't. I miss my dad and think about him every day."

It's easiest not to think about his dad when Medardo has something to

do. He loves throwing his ball, the only toy he owns, and getting the dogs to run and catch it. But he has to help his mum too.

And then there's school – he thinks that's the most important thing of all.

Cold nights

Before the sun has risen above the edge of the mountain, Medardo wakes up to his mum calling gently: "Medardo, Medardito (little Medardo)". It's cold in the house. Medardo's village is 4,000 metres above sea

level. When it's 30 degrees (Celsius) down at the coast, the ground can still be frozen in Medardo's house.

But the house warms up quickly when mum gets the fire going.

Maria Rosa, Medardo's

Medardo and his mum, Maria Rosa, outside the family house.



Medardo Jaya, 11

Favourite animal: Cow, for the milk.

Favourite food: Chicken.
Favourite sweets: Sugar-cane and pineapple.

Would like to have: A new top.
Misses: His dad and brother Ramiro.

Wants to be: A mountaineer or doctor.

PHOTO: GUNILLA HAMNE PHOTO: KIM NAYLOR





Medardo thinks Computing is the best bit of school, after Maths.



mum, doesn't really need to tell him what to do, because he does the same thing every morning. But she tells him anyway.

"Off you go and let the sheep graze below Juana's potato field. You can tie up the pigs beside them."

Medardo pulls on his warm red poncho and opens the door. The dogs follow him. They walk round the house to the enclosure at the back. Medardo and his mother have three sheep, two pigs, two goats and a cage with ten guinea pigs. They own the rest of the sheep together with their wider family – they all share what they have.

learning to plant trees. Trees with thick leaves that can survive the dry climate.

Medardo looks away to the mountain, which is an old volcano.

"Oh, Chimborazo, you are the most beautiful thing I know," he says, stretching out his arms. "I probably live in the most fantastic place on earth. I love looking up at Chimborazo. I'd like to be a mountaineer and take tourists up there."

Just then Medardo's mum calls. He has to rush down and eat breakfast or he'll be late for school. His mother, Maria Rosa, has already made porridge and boiled



them an egg each. They sit facing each other on the floor.

"Mum I really miss my brother. How do you think he is? Do you think he'll come and visit soon?"

Medardo asks. He doesn't dare to ask about his dad.

"I don't know, little Medardo. Eat up now and hurry off to school. Don't forget your exercise book."

Trees are needed

Medardo leads the sheep further and further up. He passes alongside the neighbour's potato crops. Even though it's steep they manage to grow them on the mountainside. But when it rains, a lot of earth is carried down into the valley, and the wind often blows the loose sandy soil away in sandstorms. It was much better when there were trees that kept the soil together. Medardo knows that because the teachers at school have talked about it. That's why the pupils are



Volleyball and Football in the new school yard.

Loves maths and computers

In the afternoon Medardo has a computing class. That's his favourite lesson at school after maths. Watching videos and reading newspapers is great too. He doesn't have a TV or any newspapers at home.

"If you want to you can write a letter to someone you like," says the teacher.

I'm going to write to my brother, Medardo thinks, and starts writing: "Dear Ramiro, I hope you're well. When are you coming home? I miss you and mum does too..."

Medardo gets the letter from the printer. But he doesn't have an address for his brother, so the letter will have to wait until the next time Ramiro comes to visit.

When Medardo lies in bed at night, he thinks about what he wants to be if he carries on with school. "If I don't become a mountaineer then I'd like to be a doctor, so that I can make mum better if she gets ill, and other



The pupils learn to grow vegetables. Growing vegetables is on the pupils' timetable every day. Then they eat the vegetables for lunch.



people too of course. There are so many accidents with buses and cars, you know. It's in the papers. I never want to travel by bus or car. I'm staying right here beside Chimborazo, where it's so beautiful. Although I wouldn't mind going to Riobamba sometime..." 🌐





Maribel Toaza, 10

Favourite food: Chicken soup.
Favourite animal: Cows, for milk, calves and milk pudding.
Dreams of: Starting a school for the poorest people.
Doesn't want to: Get married.
Most enjoys: Laughing. Making up riddles. When mum is happy.



Maribel plays with her friends.

José gets a scholarship



José Guzmán, 11, shows his proud mother the diploma that shows he has completed six years at school.

"I've got a scholarship now so I can start high school in town. I've been there a few times before when I helped my mum and dad to sell vegetables at the market. It'll be exciting to start there even though I like school here in San Pablo so much. Lots of people say we've got the best school.

And I think so too. I think I'm going to be a language teacher. It's so good when you can talk to almost anyone. We've been on trips with school too. We got to see the sea! And swim in a pool. School is like an adventure."

I want to be the poor people's teacher

When Maribel comes home to the village she teaches the poor children, who can't go to school, to read, write and count.

"When I grow up I want to be a teacher and start a school for the poorest children," she says.

I like my life and my school. A lot! The teachers are so nice, not like in other schools where the teachers hit the pupils. Our teachers talk instead of hitting. Everyone wants to go to this school. We get to learn so much, like English and Music. We build our own instruments, like xylophones and panpipes, and sing songs in Quechua, our own language. And we don't

need to pay to learn to use computers, like in other schools. And we get food three times a day in school."

Mondays are best

"I like Mondays best because we have assembly in the school yard. We sing Ecuador's national song and talk about how to be a good person. In the afternoon we learn to make Quechua handicrafts, like making necklaces and knitting scarves. And I like it when we work with our plants. When they're ripe we use them for school lunches.

In my village, a few kilometres from here, there are lots of poor children who work and help their parents instead of going to school. That's not fair. We've learned about the rights of the child in school. Children have a right to go to school and not to be treated badly. I tell the poor children in the village what we do in school and teach them how to count, read and write. If they can't count they get tricked when they're selling vegetables in town. When I grow up I plan to be a teacher and start a school for the poorest children."

"Dear mum!"

"Most of all I like it when my mum is happy. I help her when I come home from school. I ride the donkey to bring the sheep back from the pasture. Then I peel potato and onion, fetch water and cut grass for the guinea pigs. When we got to make presents for our mothers in school I made a card with a big

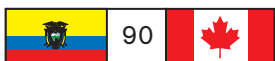
heart on it. I wrote 'Dear mum – I want to give you my best wishes because today is your day'. She was so happy. I like stories and riddles too. Like this one: Who always walks on his head?"

The answer to Maribel's riddle is at the bottom of the page. 🌐

TEXT: GUNILLA HAMNE PHOTO: KIM NAYLOR



Monday morning in the school yard.



Vicuña

Chimborazo nearest the sun



Alpaca, llama and vicuña

The mountains in Ecuador are part of the Andes mountain range, which stretches all the way down to South America's southernmost point, through Peru, Bolivia and Chile. There are animals living here that you can't find anywhere else. Alpacas and llamas are important animals for the native people – alpacas for their wool and llamas as pack animals. Tops and ponchos made from alpaca wool are very warm. Vicunas are slighter and faster. They live in the wild and are nowhere near as easy to tame as llamas and alpacas. Vicuñas have been brought in to live around Chimborazo, so that they can eventually be captured and have their wool cut once a year. Vicuna wool is finer, softer and warmer.



Alpaca

If you stand at the top of Chimborazo you are as far from the centre of the earth as you can ever get! And nearer the sun than anywhere else on the globe. The reason for this is that Chimborazo, which is an old volcano, lies near the equator, where the earth bulges out like a fat belly. And at the top of the mountain lives a monster...

Although Mount Everest, at 8,848 metres, is higher than Chimborazo, which is “only” 6,310 metres, this is still the closest you can come to the sun without flying. Many people have climbed to the top of Chimborazo. But several have died after falling down cracks in the glacier or from altitude sickness. San Pablo, the village where Medardo, Maribel and the others live, is 4,000 metres above sea level. If you're not used to being this high up you can easily feel ill here. The air has less oxygen in it and so everything feels harder to do. But the native

people who live here don't get altitude sickness.

At the top of Chimborazo there is a glacier, made of thick ice that doesn't melt even in summer, even though Chimborazo is right next to the equator. However, small amounts of ice do melt all the time and run down the mountainside as little streams. This is how the Puruhae people get all their water. Over the last few years, Chimborazo's glacier has shrunk. The thick ice has become thinner, and the snowcap has become smaller. This is presumably because the world's climate is getting warmer, as a result of what

we call the greenhouse effect. However it's also because the volcano Tungurahua blows out black ash, which lies like a blanket over Chimborazo's glacier. The ash attracts heat from the sun and heats the ice, causing it to melt.

Bird monster

It is said that a monster called Chuzalongo lives on Chimborazo. The name means “bird-shaped monster”. Very few people have seen the monster – maybe none at all. But Chuzalongo sees everything that happens around the mountain and knows who is in the area.

Chimborazo is important for all those who live around the mountain. The native people used to offer gifts to the powerful mountain in order to get good harvests, lots of children and good weather. 🌐

THE JURY FOR THE WORLD'S CHILDREN'S PRIZE 2006

LE JURY POUR LE PRIX DES ENFANTS DU MONDE 2006 EL JURADO DEL PREMIO DE LOS NIÑOS DEL MUNDO 2006 O JÚRI DO PRÊMIO CRIANÇAS DO MUNDO 2006



The children of the jury that will decide who will be awarded the World's Children's Prize are experts on the Rights of the Child as a result of their own experiences. They have been child soldiers, slaves, street-children, refugees and fighters for children's rights.

They represent all the children of the world who have similar experiences.

