

American Helps Reunite Trafficked Nepalese Children With Families



Next Generation Nepal
Conor Grennan with the family of a lost child

FAITH LAPIDUS: Welcome to THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English. I'm Faith Lapidus.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: And I'm Christopher Cruise. This week on our program, we meet an American man working to reunite children with their families in Nepal. Then, we have a story on the Girl Scouts of the USA -- the organization is celebrating a big birthday. And, finally, we look at what some people are willing to do for another member of the family: their pets.

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: Conor Grennan was nearly thirty years old when he decided he wanted to do something different with his life. He left his job and used his life's savings to plan a trip around the world. He began with Nepal near the end of its ten-year civil war.

There, the American volunteered at an orphanage for three months. Eighteen young children were living in the Little Princes Children's Home near Kathmandu, the capital. Mr. Grennan helped take care of the children and taught them English.

CONOR GRENNAN: "I was very worried about it because I had never really spent much time with children before. As soon as I got into that world, I really enjoyed it. We became very, very close by the end of my time there."

He decided to return to Nepal a year later, in two thousand six, after the war ended. He discovered then that the children were not really orphans but the victims of human traffickers.

CONOR GRENNAN: "All these children had parents. They weren't orphans at all. These children had been actually taken because their parents feared that they would be abducted by the rebels. Their parents had actually paid these traffickers not knowing that the traffickers intended to sell their children. They thought they would take their children to protect them."

The children had been sold and then abandoned, and ended up at the Little Princes Children's Home.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Conor Grennan now had a new goal. He set out to help reconnect Nepalese families with children sold into trafficking.

CONOR GRENNAN: "There were so many children, probably fifteen thousand children that were affected by this problem."

Mr. Grennan became an advocate for those children. In his book "Little Princes," he explains why.

CONOR GRENNAN: "It's amazing how a problem can really come to life when you get to know the people who are victims of these problems."

He says he wrote the memoir to help raise awareness about child trafficking, but also to show that anyone can make a difference.

Mr. Grennan established a nonprofit group in Kathmandu called Next Generation Nepal. The organization works to find lost children and reunite them with their families. So far, he says, his group has reconnected three hundred Nepalese children with their relatives.

FAITH LAPIDUS: Nancy Wong is a volunteer who has been working with Mr. Grennan since last August.

NANCY WONG: "I basically give up my life in the U.S. and I feel like I need go to Nepal to join your group and really try to make a difference for these trafficked children."

Ms. Wong says reuniting the children with their families is a process.

NANCY WONG: "The first step is, of course, rescuing them from exploitation and securing them into our transit homes. We do that in partnership with the government of Nepal."

The second step is to search for the biological family. She gave an example of a girl who had been separated from her family since she was two years old.

NANCY WONG: "We had no real name. We had no idea even what part of Nepal she's from."

But she says workers known as integration managers guessed the general area where the girl was from based on her facial features.

NANCY WONG: "[They] literally went from village to village, from bus stops to tea shops to restaurants, asking for any clue. And finally after a few months we found her uncle."

She says the work continues even after children are reunited with their families. "We monitor the progress," she says, "to make sure that they are integrating well, going to school, and are not being exploited at home."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Conor Grennan says child trafficking in Nepal is part of a bigger problem.

CONOR GRENNAN: "There is the sexual trafficking, there's the labor trafficking, there's the trafficking we see in Nepal. There has to be some kind of, I believe, external pressure on the government to take these seriously and to start looking at policies that can really combat these problems effectively."

(MUSIC)

FAITH LAPIDUS: The Girl Scouts of the USA are celebrating their one hundredth birthday this year. A woman named Juliette Gordon Low organized the first Girl Scout troop on March twelfth, nineteen twelve. It was in Savannah, in the southern American state of Georgia. Since then, more than fifty million American women have been in the Girl Scouts.

(SOUND)

These are Girl Scouts singing in a neighborhood park in New Orleans. Ten-year-old Cassidy Lee Brookes enjoys all the outdoor activities that her troop does.

CASSIDY LEE BROOKES: "We go canoeing, we go camping, we do sing-alongs, we do all kinds of stuff."

Cassidy wears a green Girl Scout vest covered with the badges she has earned by learning new skills, like going on a camping trip.

CASSIDY LEE BROOKES: "If you do camping you get badges and all kinds of stuff for cooking and cleaning, because you have to do everything on your own. You have to cook the food, you have to serve it. So it is really fun."



AP

Girl Scout Brownies selling cookies in a Raleigh, North Carolina, neighborhood

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Outdoor activities have remained a large part of scouting for girls and boys. But as roles for women in society have changed, so have the Girl Scouts. Fifteen-year-old Mania Gaver says scouting helps her to gain valuable experience for the future. For instance, the girls can earn patches for their vests by learning about jobs and serving in the community.

MANIA GAVAR: "To get patches you have to interview different people in different jobs, you can shadow like museum curators and stuff like that. There are a lot of trips you can go on, service-wise, and a lot of volunteer opportunities."

Juliette Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts in the United States a few years after two organizations, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, began in England. Her goal was to help girls develop physically, mentally and spiritually by bringing them into community service and the open air.

FAITH LAPIDUS: Lidia Soto-Harmon, chief executive of the Girl Scout Council, says Low faced many challenges.

LIDIA SOTO-HARMAN: "There were people that did not believe that girls should do anything more than learn how to bake and be at home, and here she was taking girls camping. We have pictures of her with girls and machetes because when they would go camping, they really went out into the wilderness."

Today more than ten million girls take part in scouting in one hundred forty-five countries -- from Argentina to Zambia. There are three million girls and adult volunteers in the Girl Scouts of the USA. Ms. Soto-Harman says this year is a time for the organization to look back and ahead.

LIDIA SOTO-HARMAN: "As we approach this one hundredth anniversary we are just bursting at the opportunity we have to really inspire a new generation of girls with the message of leadership, with the message of caring for the environment, with the message of being kind to others, respecting country. These are values that we all share and that we need to celebrate."

(MUSIC)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: In New York City last week, a four-year-old Pekingese named Malachy won the top prize at the nation's top dog show.

ANNOUNCER: "Best in show at the one hundred thirty-sixth annual Westminster Kennel Club, America's dog show, is the Pekingese."

Malachy defeated six other dogs to take the top prize on Valentine's Day. The five-kilo dog with a big head of hair has won many top prizes. But last year he finished second at Westminster. More than two thousand dogs competed in the two-day show.

This year, the club replaced its longtime television sponsor, dog food maker Pedigree. News reports said Westminster officials were unhappy with commercials showing sad images of dogs in need of adoption. The new sponsor, Nestle Purina PetCare, presents much happier looking dogs in its commercials.

FAITH LAPIDUS: Half of all Americans own a pet, mostly cats and dogs. That means a lot of business for the pet care industry. Americans spent fifty billion dollars on their pets last year. That was twenty-three percent more than in two thousand seven.

In Alexandria, Virginia, Gay Lynn Fourney brings her dog to A Dog's Day Out, which offers day care and overnight services.

GAY LYNN FOURNEY: "She's my little girl, and I just want to make sure that she has a good time during the day while I'm at work."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Chas Richardson owns A Dog's Day Out. He says his business earns a twenty-five percent profit.



Deborah Block

A four-legged client of A Dog's Day Out, a day care business in Alexandria, Virginia

CHAS RICHARDSON: "The pet industry continues to explode with growth. Our market, dog care, we believe has nothing but growth ahead of it."

Duane Ekadahl heads the Pet Food Institute, a trade group. He thinks the pet care industry has grown because more people are treating their pets like members of the family.

DUANE EKAD AHL: "People want to return the affection they get from pets, and so

they buy good food, good products, toys and so on."

Some cans of higher-priced pet foods have names meant to sound like something their owners might order at a restaurant. One example for cats: "Tender Turkey Tuscany With Long Grain Rice and Garden Greens in a Savory Sauce."

In Arlington, Virginia, Kamala Mohammed manages a bakery for dogs -- the Dogma Gourmet Dog Bakery and Pet Boutique.

KAMALA MOHAMMED: "We don't put any added salt, sugar or preservatives into our cookies. In fact, I have some people that come in and buy a cookie for themselves because it's all human-grade ingredients."

Judy Smith shops there -- she buys cookies for her three dogs. She also owns a travel agency, Woof Woof Travels, which serves the growing number of people who travel with their pets.

JUDY SMITH: "I can tell you which cities are very pet-friendly, and once you've decide on that, fix you up in a hotel or motel, give you activities that you can do there, including restaurants that are pet friendly."

FAITH LAPIDUS: Bark and Bubbles in Fairfax, Virginia, is a business where owners can wash their dogs themselves or pay to have it done. Dogs can also have a birthday party and even get a facial so they look their prettiest.

High school student Shannon Parker chooses the self-serve dog wash. She gives her dog a bath and a blueberry facial. She says the visits are worth the cost compared to the trouble of washing her dog at home.

SHANNON PARKER: "She kind of gets the water all over the house. For me, it's just a much better option than me trying to do it myself."

(MUSIC)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Our program was produced by Brianna Blake, with reporting by Faiza Elmasry, Selah Hennessy and Deborah Block. I'm Christopher Cruise.

FAITH LAPIDUS: And I'm Faith Lapidus. Join us again next week for THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English.