

# Relief Nursery

August 3, 2006



**W**hen I pulled into the parking lot of the Relief Nursery in Eugene, Oregon, I took a deep breath. After being on tour for two weeks already my legs ached just stepping out of the car. We had traveled from Edmonton, Canada all the way down the Northwest, dipping into cities along the way as if we were a flock of birds. I knew that for this program I'd have to have my feet on the ground, so I took a moment, soaking in the morning summer sun and the fresh air.

I am a musician on a mission. My band and I are on the Celebrate

Peace Tour, sponsored by Peace Cereal and Spirit Voyage Music. While on tour we give concerts dedicated to peace on the planet and award grants from Peace Cereal to local organizations in many of the cities where we give concerts. One of our greatest passions is working with children who I call disenfranchised. It's hard to put a name to it, but there is a whole population of children in our country who are removed from basic privileges that are considered normal for many of us. This population is surprisingly large, but through the Celebrate Peace Tour we have been blessed to partner with some of the organizations in this country who are working to improve the lives of these children. We have visited children



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in juvenile halls, foster care homes, and poor neighborhoods. We offer music, yoga, and stories all aimed at giving the children we meet a sense of positive self esteem and some basic yogic tools for mental peace and clarity. Most importantly we like to have fun!

Usually I travel with GuruGanesha, who plays guitar and always gets the kids laughing, along with Krishan Prakash, who plays tabla and does a great bear snore for our yoga story. That day however I was without my band and I was visiting a place called the Relief Nursery. I took my new guitar out of the trunk, grasped the soft handle and said a prayer that I would be able to do this program on my own. I knew a little about the Relief Nursery because they were this year's Peace Grant Recipient in Eugene, Oregon. The next evening I would be giving them the grant at

the end of our Celebrate Peace concert.

The Relief Nursery gives care to children who are in abusive or potentially abusive homes. Many of the children who come to the center come from homes where their parents have drug problems or are incarcerated. The center provides a beautiful school and day care where they not only nurture the children but also provide counseling for the parents. Their philosophy is that the most important support system for a child is their family, so the family has to be healthy.

I felt like I had nothing to give in light of the problems these children were growing up with. As I walked through the parking lot I could see some children playing in the school playground and



realized that the best thing I could give was love.

The moment I stepped into the school's office I was greeted by a staff member and immediately lead to where the children's program would take place. I settled on a beautiful grassy spot underneath a tree. Within seconds all thirty children at the school gathered around me. I tried to breathe and calm my now beating heart with the thought... "give love, give love."

Children from the ages of about five to eight gathered around me. I said hello to the kids, and quickly realized that a couple of the children only spoke Spanish. We started off with a little yoga, which the kids did with a lot of gusto. I've done probably close to a hundred children's programs in the past, but these kids were different. As I looked at each one of them, I realized that what they call "home" may not be what I could ever feel was home. What they called love, was more simple than I had ever imagined. As they looked at me and followed the yoga postures, there was nothing but that simple love. Even though they giggled and laughed their way through some of the yoga postures, and even

though I could barely keep them engaged, their eyes seemed to never leave me.

As we got deeper into the story where I teach the kids yoga and songs, I began to realize what I had to deliver to these kids. It was a moment of joy. And so I asked them to all stand up, and just like the kids in the story who were walking up a mountain, I asked them to march in place with me and sing the song "I am happy, I am good." These are words of the revered yoga master and sage Yogi BhaJan. As we sang it we alternated with English and Spanish, "Yo soy feliz, Yo soy bueno." With each repetition the kids' voices got louder and louder... until finally all of us spontaneously threw our arms in the air and yelled the words of the song with joy and celebration. The kids, myself and the staff all paused momentarily in disbelief at our outburst, and with a giggle from a few children and a universal twinkle in all of the children's eyes we proceeded to yell it again, and again.

At that moment I was almost overcome by tears... for me I was yelling those words right into their homes, right into their lives,



and praying that they would have the opportunity to have a beautiful life. That moment of joy will live in my heart forever.

After the program I got a tour of the facility and was thoroughly inspired by what I saw. The center has a room dedicated to counseling, where families come for sessions with highly qualified family therapists. They also have a library where English and Spanish classes are offered. I saw an amazing kitchen facility where nutritious meals are prepared for the children; meals which many of them would not receive otherwise. One of my favorite aspects of the Relief Nursery was a “hand me down” room where parents could bring their kids and get free clothing, shoes, and school supplies. Each of the classrooms had really nice desks, books, and art material. I felt that any child would be blessed to be here, but the fact that these kids have the opportunity was so beautiful to me.

I arrived that morning, tired from my touring but left completely inspired and energized by my experience with these children. It's easy to get caught up in our lives, with work, with our families,

and our endeavors. It's easy to get stressed out, even when we have such privileged lives. I saw how serving these children not only gave them something, but gave me something as well, and that yes, it is possible to make a difference in this world... even with one guitar.

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To find out more about Snatam and the Celebrate Peace Tour, please go to [www.snatamkaur.com](http://www.snatamkaur.com).

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To find out more about Relief Nursery, please visit: [www.reliefnursery.org](http://www.reliefnursery.org)

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For more information about the Peace Cereal please visit: [www.peacecereal.com](http://www.peacecereal.com). For more information about the Spirit Voyage please visit: [www.spiritvoyage.com](http://www.spiritvoyage.com).

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