



# On Top of the World

## MCC Grad Makes Children of Nepal Smile



Marcy Servita (top) shares smiles with some of the children who had their teeth cleaned at a week-long Himalayan Dental Relief Project clinic in Nepal.



Nepali children line up at the clinic, with the help of volunteers.



The towering, majestic Himalayas – the rooftop of the world – were the magnificent backdrop for the dental clinic.

**M**arcy Servita, a dental hygienist and 1993 graduate of MCC's Dental Hygiene Program, has traveled far from Middlesex, taking her smile, skills and compassion to bring critical dental care to children in a very remote corner of the world.

Last fall, Servita, who now lives in Boulder, Colorado, participated in a humanitarian dental clinic in Katmandu, Nepal. Organized by the Himalayan Dental Relief Project, these clinics have been bringing direct dental care to children in Nepal since 2000. The clinic was held at a local Katmandu Boarding School, founded to meet the needs of children from the remote Himalayas where there are no schools.

A school classroom was converted into a seven-chair dental office. Assisted by older, local students who received on-site training in basic oral health skills, the one-week intensive clinic served 725 patients, many of whom had never before received dental care. The volunteers included four dentists, three hygienists and six non-medical volunteers.

"Language was not a real barrier," Servita said. "The older children who assisted us usually spoke very good English, and most of the other children speak some English. Also, these kids are wonderful patients - cheerful, excited and very enthusiastic."

After the week-long Katmandu clinic, the volunteers trekked up lush hillsides to the distant village of Khumjung, in the shadows of Mount Everest, where they held tooth-brushing and oral hygiene assemblies for children. The volunteers then continued farther up to Tengboche village for more assemblies. These remote villages are reached only by trekking up steep ridge trails for three to six hours a day, which the group did for three days to get as far as Tengboche. The only other way to get to the villages is by riding a yak.

"People in Nepal walk for miles to get medical and dental help," said Servita. "There are very few health clinics, and there is more need for dental help now because of the introduction of Western products, such as refined sugar and soft drinks. Also, daily tooth-brushing is a new concept for most of these children, so oral health education is essential."

A native of Malden, Massachusetts, Servita came to Middlesex after high school. While at MCC, she was impressed with the fact that many Middlesex internships involved working with underprivileged children. She did one internship at the Fernald School in Waltham, the state's oldest institution for the mentally handicapped, and has always had a strong desire to do volunteer work on an international level.

After falling in love with the Colorado area during a ski vacation, Servita moved there nearly 10 years ago and can no longer imagine living on the East Coast. "I am a real outdoor fan. I ski, run, bike and love all outdoor activities. Plus, Boulder is a university town, with terrific cultural activities, and I have worked for an amazing dentist for the past nine years," she said.

Although this was Servita's first international humanitarian trip, she spends considerable time working with charitable causes in the U.S. She has participated in AIDS bicycle rides from Boston to New York, and San Francisco to Los Angeles, to raise money for HIV/AIDS programs. She is also co-chair of *Intercambio des Comunidades*, a nonprofit organization that teaches English to Spanish-speaking immigrants.

Celebrating her birthday at the Katmandu clinic was one of the most memorable parts of the trip for Servita. "The kids got a cake and created great cards and letters while an assistant and volunteer put together a song and guitar serenade. That was a birthday I won't soon forget, and I will always treasure my box full of cards and letters," she said.

The Himalayan Dental Relief Project (HDRP), provides free dental care and oral health education to impoverished children in Nepal and India, and has expanded services to Vietnam and Guatemala in partnership with local organizations. HDRP's commitment is to return to these same children every two years to provide continuous care. Volunteer dentists, hygienists and non-medical volunteers deliver treatment and preventative care to children in schools, orphanages and remote villages. Since 2001, HDRP has hosted more than 210 volunteers and treated more than 24,000 children. Volunteers pay their own expenses. Some are sponsored by their employers, while others often hold fund-raising events to cover their expenses.

Servita plans to return to Nepal for future clinics and most likely will request to go to Guatemala next, the newest site for HDRP. "This trip was an incredibly rewarding and inspiring experience. I get a lot out of giving back. Working with this dedicated group of people and helping these marvelous children really made me think about values and priorities and how our measures of self-worth differ from those of people in developing countries," she said. "People in Nepal seem happy, even though most of them are very poor. They were extremely appreciative of our efforts and genuinely delighted to see us."

For more information about the Himalayan Dental Relief Project, go to [www.himalayandental.com](http://www.himalayandental.com).

- Deborah Kearney