

# LOCAL

## She has promises to keep, miles to go

Lladro Gallery on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills sits on some of the world's most expensive real estate.

The Mawella refugee camp in Sri Lanka sits on some of its poorest.

In a few weeks, the two worlds will come together, thanks to the humanitarian efforts of Dr. Martina Fuchs, a 44-year-old pediatrician from Studio City.

Her mission started in December 2004, as she watched the news broadcasts of the devastating tsunami that killed an estimated 300,000 people.

"Looking at all those children who had lost everything was the first time in my life something touched me that deeply," she said.

Deeply enough that she dropped everything and traveled alone to Sri Lanka to offer her medical skills.

She could have waited and gone through the months-long process of signing on and traveling with a relief agency, but Fuchs didn't think the homeless orphans she saw on TV had time to wait.

"My friends said I was crazy, that I couldn't go alone. I was scared, sure, but this was too important for me not to go."

Fuchs filled two suitcases with medicine and one with clothes, and caught the next flight out. Along the way she met a carpenter from Australia and a

plumber from Scotland who were on their way to help, too.

Together, they opened a clinic in the Mawella refugee camp in southern Sri Lanka — a place so impoverished that people couldn't even afford the 10 cents to take the bus to the hospital five miles away.

"There were two small, empty rooms in the back of a building for people to stay who had lost everything," she said. "With 45,000 people killed, just about everyone in Sri Lanka had lost someone.

"The rooms had no doors or windows. We put them in, painted the walls, built an examination table, hung curtains for privacy, and ran electricity in.

"Within a few days, the line outside the clinic stretched through the camp. Not just children — everyone came. Old people, pregnant women.

"It soon became evident we needed to give them more than medical help. They needed emotional and psychological support, as well.

"One poor woman had to choose which of her children's hands to let go of when the waters washed over them. She let go of her 8-year-old daughter, who drowned, and held onto her 6-year-old son, who survived. No amount of medicine is going to fix that.

"We tried to ease the fear in the kids by having them paint us a picture of



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Real Medicine Foundation

Dr. Martina Fuchs of the Real Medicine Foundation with children from the Mawella refugee camp in Sri Lanka who were left homeless by a tsunami.

the tsunami in exchange for a tennis ball. We gave out more than 100 tennis balls."

Before she left six weeks later, Fuchs found a doctor willing to keep her clinic going three days a week.

"I made them a promise I would not forget them," she said. "And I do not

break my promises."

Back at home, Fuchs turned to her friends and colleagues to help her start the Real Medicine Foundation, a non-profit network of doctors and individuals who, like her, just wanted to help.

In two years, the Real Medicine Foundation has grown to 80 professionals, in

and out of the medical field, working in nine countries.

With clinics and other health projects in India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and Mozambique, they're able to respond to both natural disasters and human tragedies.

Fuchs herself returned to Sri Lanka last year to open two preschools for kids who lost their parents in the tsunami.

"We've got people from all walks of life now, offering us not only medical but economic and social support so we can grow and help even more people," she said Monday.

Which brings us back to Beverly Hills.

At 6 p.m. Aug. 16, a fundraiser for the Real Medicine Foundation will be held at the Lladro Gallery, 408 N. Rodeo Drive. There will be entertainment and an auction of artwork from Yoko Ono, Sean Lennon, Jean Michel Basquiat, Dennis Hopper and many other well-known artists and actors.

For more information, see [www.real-medicinefoundation.org](http://www.real-medicinefoundation.org).

All because a Studio City pediatrician made a promise to the kids in the Mawella refugee camp. And she does not break a promise.

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