

TSUNAMI DISASTER ELICITS A WAVE OF STUDENT SUPPORT



Led by the Exeter Social Service Organization (ESSO), students and other members of the PEA community raised more than \$21,000 for the tsunami relief effort. Above: ESSO President Will Hamlin '05 preps for an ESSO fund-raiser.

The tsunami that devastated parts of Southeastern Asia struck just before students came back to the Academy from winter break. Will Hamlin '05, head of the Exeter Social Service Organization (ESSO) was visiting his family in California when he first learned of the disaster. He immediately sent emails to Lily Zhou '05, ESSO's vice president, and to ESSO adviser Reverend Bob Thompson '72 to plan a meeting for as soon as they returned to school.

More than 50 students turned out for that January meeting, and pledged to raise \$15,000 for the relief effort. The group also set a goal of 100 percent participation by the student body. In addition to soliciting donations from other students, ESSO members also organized a series of bake sales to raise still more funds. While documenting the actual number of students who participated proved difficult (many made their donations in cash), it's clear that ESSO succeeded in mobilizing and motivating not only the student body, but also the faculty and staff, many of whom also contributed to the fund.

Meanwhile, Ari Mannan '07 screened a video he had assembled depicting the devastation, first in assembly and later for the Academy's Trustees, who were on campus for their January meeting. Stirred by the power of the images and impressed by the students' initiative, the Trustees took up their own collection, donating more than \$3,000 to the Exeter Tsunami Relief Fund—bringing the total raised to more than \$21,000 to be sent to the International Red Cross.

'A BEAUTIFUL HEART':

ORLANTHA AMBROSE '89 (1971–2004) | By Susanna Baird '89 and Melissa Cusick '89

When we look at snapshots of Orlantha Ambrose '89—or “O,” as her friends called her—we are reminded of what we loved about this beautiful, self-confident young woman. The joy she found in small things. Her goofy sense of humor. Her huge, contagious smile.

Our photo albums have been a source comfort to us since we learned that Orlantha was among those who perished last December in the tsunami that struck Southeastern Asia. There's a shot of her hanging upside down off our top bunk. Another shows Orlantha, a California girl, experiencing that distinctly New England treat, the Fluffernutter. A third captures her wearing an uncharacteristically preppy cardigan, red plastic lips and a giant red foam hand that reads “We're #1, Exeter Rules.”

She, like us, was only at Exeter for a year—barely enough time to get over homesickness, make real friendships and adjust to the heightened academic demands. In many ways, it was a tough year; but O's warm, generous friendship made it an infinitely happier time for us.

Orlantha grew up in Los Angeles, the oldest child of Anton and Beulah Ambrose, an obstetrician/gynecologist and a pianist who emigrated from Sri Lanka in the early 1970s. Their tight-knit, loving family also includes O's younger brother, Cezhan. Both children began studying music at a young age, and Orlantha displayed a natural affinity for the violin at an early age.

After finishing high school, Orlantha headed to Exeter for a post-graduate year. Anyone who knew her at Exeter remembers her musical talent. She played beautifully and seemingly effortlessly, with tremendous passion. She also loved spending time with kids,

and, amid a rigorous PEA schedule, found time to give lessons to the daughters of her math teacher, Eric Bergofsky.

After Exeter, Orlantha returned to the West Coast to attend the University of California at Santa Barbara. She became a teacher, working most recently at Walgrove Elementary School in the Mar Vista neighborhood of L.A. Her passion and commitment soon led her to found a nonprofit organization, Strings by the Sea, dedicated to teaching violin to inner-city public school children.

As much as she loved Southern California, Sri Lanka was always very dear to Orlantha's heart, and so in 2003 she took a leave of absence from her job with the L.A. Unified School District to take the Strings by the Sea program to Colombo—her father's hometown. Dr. and Mrs. Ambrose joined her there last Christmas, and attended a holiday concert performed by local students. On December 26, the three were vacationing at the shore when Orlantha and her mother were killed.

Dr. Ambrose and Cezhan plan to keep O's spirit alive by continuing her wonderful work with children through Strings by the Sea. The organization's web site (www.orlanthaskids.org) features a quote from legendary music educator Shinichi Suzuki: “If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart.” Orlantha Ambrose certainly did.

Susanna Baird and Melissa Cusick were housemates of Orlantha's while at Exeter.



The December 26 tsunami claimed the life of Orlantha Ambrose '89, who was working as a music teacher in Sri Lanka.