

India #17

It has been two years since you signed up for school. Your family was very angry with you but you can be very stubborn and, in the end, you “won.” The first year you went to a “bridge” school that helped you catch up to the other children your age. At that school you learned to read, do math, and many other things. The teachers took really good care of you and helped you learn new skills – like how to study, and take care of yourself, and how to dance. Now you go to a different school and you are doing very well. The teachers have helped you realize that you can do many things in your life and that education will help you to achieve your goals.

You want to stay in school and study to be a teacher. The problem is that your family has arranged for your marriage to Joebin, a local boy from your village. They have set aside a dowry for you and you are to be married in two months. Your teachers tell you that it isn’t a good thing – for you to be married at such a young age. Although some girls can stay in school after they marry, this won’t be true for you.

Your teachers tell you that you should stay in school. Your family, however, is insisting that you get married. It would bring shame to your family if you did not marry this man. The dowry has been arranged. In your village the families always arrange for the marriages of their children. Your parents are giving you no choice. If you do not marry, you will disgrace them and they will disown you. If you don’t get married, you are not sure you would be able to stay in school because you would have no money or place to live.

To get married, go to #2. To stay in school (if possible) and not get married, go to #10.

India #25

You continue to work for the farmer, but you are more and more unhappy. Many of the children of your area have been taken out of their work and placed in school. You continue to talk with your parents about your desire to go to school, but your father and mother don't seem to be changing their minds. You finally decide that you will no longer work for the farmer and you walk away from the job one night. You return to your family and your parents are furious. They say they will disown you as they need your income from the farm and they want you to obey them. You know they care for you but the family's needs are their ultimate priority. You feel alone and frightened. You realize that you made a mistake assuming that they would bend to your wishes. You are not sure what to do. You don't want to stay here in this village and work for the farmer for the rest of your life. You have wanted to go to school, but you are not sure how you would do that without your family's support. You are tempted to just run away to the city, to get away from all of this. Perhaps there would be opportunities for you there.

To try to get an education, go to #10. To go to the city, go to #13.

India #2

You and Joebin are married in a traditional Indian ceremony. It is a beautiful day where you are surrounded by your friends and family. You move with him into a little hut in the local village. Joebin has a job at a pottery store. He is learning how to make pots to sell to tourists. He doesn't work everyday, but he works whenever he can. The job doesn't pay very much and so you must also work. Since you know how to work in the fields, your husband makes an arrangement for you to work for a local farmer. You must walk a couple of miles each day to the farm, and once again you find yourself in the fields, herding cattle. You miss the time at school and wish that you were able to be back in the classroom. It is almost harder now to do the same work – because you know so much more now than you did as a child.

A company is moving in to your town and is looking for girls to work in the factory. You are not sure what the job will be – something having to do with cotton. The men who are looking for laborers tell you that they will pay a higher wage. They are trying to hire a lot of the younger girls of the village because the work demands small and agile fingers. You hear from your old teachers that they are very upset about this company because many young girls are leaving school to work in the factory. You are not sure what to do. The higher wages would be a great help to you and your husband. You are interested in the job, but you find out that you will be inside working about 10 hours each day, 6 days a week. You are pregnant with your first child and you are not sure if the factory would give you your job back after the baby is born. At least on the farm you get some fresh air and you will be able to take the baby with you once it is born. You must make a decision about what you will do. The extra money would be really helpful.

If you will take the job at the factory, go to #14. To keep working for the farmer, go to #15

India #10

Your father beats you very badly and threatens you. You don't know where you got the courage to stand up for yourself, but you did. The teachers really want you to be in school, but you don't know how. They are trying to find you a place in a home for students who attend school but can't live with their families. They tell you that there are a lot of young people in the same situation as you. Although you want to be in school, there is also a factory in town that is just opening up. They have approached you about working for them. The teachers are angry with this company because they are specifically targeting young girls like you with small and agile fingers to work in the factory. Many of the girls in the school are dropping out in order to work in the factory. The job would give you the money that you need to support yourself. Otherwise, you will have to depend on charity to live.

To take the job in the factory, go to India #30. To get an education, go to #22.

India #13

You are able to get a ride into the city of Chuadapah and you are surprised by what you find. You thought that there might be a place for you to stay or a job. But it seems like there are people everywhere without jobs, sleeping on the streets. In order to eat you find that you have to beg from people. You start begging on the street corners but finally end up going to the train station, because there are a lot of people coming in and out of the trains. People will sometimes give you money or chocolate or something else to eat. There are a lot of other people begging at the train station and you are surprised when two other children threaten you. They tell you that this is their "area" of the station and that you have no right to be there. You are very confused by all of this at first but after a while you begin to find your way.

You meet a couple of other children and you work together to beg for what you can. You think that you are the oldest of your friends, but they have been on the streets for a lot longer than you have been. One of the girls doesn't know how old she is because she ran away from her father such a long time ago that she has no idea when her birthday is. You are surviving on the streets, but just barely. Because you are getting older (you are 13 years old already), you no longer get lots of food from tourists because you aren't "cute" like the other children. You are approached about selling your blood as a way of making money. It isn't a lot of money, but it might be enough to survive on. You are not sure that you want to do this though because you have known people who got pretty sick doing it.

To stay begging at the train station (even though you are making less and less), go to #28. To sell your blood, go to #29.

India #15

Money is very tight in your family right now. Years have passed and you continue to work for the farmer and your husband works when he can too. You have three children now and with a family of five to feed and a drought in the area, things are getting very hard. Your oldest child is about the age (6 years old) you were when you first started working. She has been helping to prepare the meals, do the laundry, and take care of her brothers. Money is so tight right now that your husband would like her to begin working for the farmer that you work for.

You would very much like her to go to school. You and Joebin fight about this quite often. He does not think it is necessary for your daughter to go to school. Joebin thinks it might be worth it to send the boys to school, because they will help to support your family. But your daughter will be married into a different family and will support them, so why should you sacrifice the money that she could earn now for an education for her? You are not sure what you should do. You know how important going to school was for you, but things are very hard right now. If your daughter was enrolled in school, who would help you with the family tasks?

To insist to your husband that your daughter go to school, go to #3. To allow your daughter to continue helping around the home and perhaps be employed (but not go to school), go to #4.

India #14

You worked at the factory for only 6 months. The money was better than what you made in the fields, but the work was really hard. You worked in the hybrid cotton industry – removing the cotton from the husks. Your hands get pretty torn up in the process of removing the cotton and sitting on the floor every day was really hard on your back because you were pregnant. You worked until the day before your daughter was born. With a new baby at home, you aren't sure what to do. Your family really needs money because Joebin does not earn very much. You saved as much as you could when you were working in the factory, but after three months, you must begin to work again.

One of your neighbors tells you about a microfinance project that is beginning in your area, sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. Eight other women are joining forces to get a small loan so that they can start businesses. One of the women will buy some chickens to produce eggs that can be sold in the village, and another is going to buy a sewing machine so that she can make clothes to be sold. She invites you to come to an informational meeting about this. It sounds interesting, but you are not sure what sort of business you would begin. You worry that taking a loan would only make things worse for your family.

To go to the informational meeting to find out more about the microfinance project, go to #5. To look for other work, go to #6.

India #22

Your teachers made arrangements for you to live at the convent school in the neighboring village. Your room and board is paid to the school through the donations of a family in the United States. You are so lucky to have this family willing to help you. Each month you write them a letter and they write back quite often too. Now that you are studying English the letters are getting more and more interesting. You don't know how you will ever be able to pay them back for their kindness, but you try to make sure that they know how much you appreciate their help through your letters.

When you are 17, you complete your education. You have been planning to become a teacher. There is a program in your area that will train you to teach in a village school. You would need to go away for a few months to learn about the teaching methods and you would spend the summer months preparing your lessons. By next fall you would be teaching little children in a village about 100 miles away. While you want to be a teacher, you are also afraid to leave your school. The nuns at the convent where you have been living have asked you to continue to live at the school and help them care for the other students. This school has been your family for the past three years and you really don't want to leave it. It is time for you to decide on your future.

To become a teacher, go to #18. To stay and serve the students of the convent school, go to #20.

India #30

You have been working at the factory for a year. The money is important, but the work is really long and hard. You work in the hybrid cotton industry – removing the cotton from the husks. Your hands get pretty torn up in the process of removing the cotton and all of the dust in the factory makes it hard for you to breathe some days. You are working 10 hours a day, six days a week. You live in the factory housing with all the girls you work with. You are glad to have somewhere to live. Your hut is very small and you are sharing it with 7 others, but you and the other girls have tried to make it a home. You have many good friends in the factory, but not everyone is nice. There are often fights between the other girls and sometimes things get pretty bad. You thought that you would have more money and would be able to save some, but most of your money ends up paying for your food and housing. Someone has been coming around the factory trying to get the workers to quit working and return to their families or school. You would love to go back to school, but you don't have any way of supporting yourself without this job. You are told that there will be help for you if you leave.

To leave your job and hope for help, go to #11. To stay at the factory, go to #12.

India #28

As you are begging one day, you are approached by a man who asks you if you want to come and live with him. You have had these types of offers before, now that you are getting older. He explains, however, that he is a Catholic priest and he runs a home for street children. At the home you would learn a trade, and get some education, and they would take care of you. You can't believe this offer. It must be too good to be true. You talk with your friends about this because you always make decisions together. You are excited about the chance to get off the streets. Your friends, however, don't like the idea that they will lose their freedom. They have been on their own for a lot longer than you have been. They don't want you to go because they need the money that you earn in order to survive. You are not sure what to do. You wouldn't be alive today, you are sure, without their help, but you don't want to live like this for the rest of your life.

To go to the home for street children, go to #8. To stay with your friends, begging at the station, go to #21.

India #29

The first couple of times you sell your blood you think you made a really good decision. But now that you are doing it more and more, you are getting really sick. The blood is sold on the black market and you know that someone is paying a lot of money for it, but you don't see much of it. You have met a group of friends that you live with in a park. One of the boys likes you a lot and you are talking about getting married. He is as poor as you are, but maybe if you were married things would be different. At least you would have someone who would protect you and care for you.

One day as you are coming from the blood center, you are approached by a man who tells you that he is a priest who runs a home for street children. He would like for you to come to the house to live. You can hardly believe that he is telling you the truth, but he tells you that you would have a house, food, and they would teach you a trade so that you could get a real job. You ask if your boyfriend could come too, and the priest says yes.

You are very excited about all of this but when you tell your boyfriend, he isn't interested. He doesn't want to lose his freedom and believes that he will be able to make something of his life on his own. He doesn't want you to go either. He tells you that he loves you and that he will marry you right away if that will keep you from leaving him. You must decide. Should you trust this stranger that offers you a home or stay with the boy who says he loves you?

To go to the home, go to #8. To stay with your boyfriend, go to #9.

India #3

You enroll your daughter in school and you are very happy with the change that you begin to see in her. She is changing everyday and gaining confidence. It is good for you too because you are able to help her with her studies. You remember again the joy of learning and take great care to help your daughter take advantage of all that school has to offer. You are only 20 years old, but as a wife and mother of three, you realize that many opportunities in life have passed you by. You want to make sure that your daughter will have opportunities that you never did. When the school begins to offer classes at night for parents who have never been to school, the teacher asks you if you will help with the class. You are now helping to teach the adults of your village to read and write. You are finally getting the chance to be the teacher that you always wanted to be. It is only one night a week, but it is a bright spot in your life.

Take a *India Discussion Questions* handout. Go to your small group area and take some time to review the questions and write down some thoughts.

India #4

Your decision not to insist on school for your daughter ends up being a very bad one. When the time comes for your sons to go to school, things are only harder financially and Joebin refuses to enroll them also. They now work in the fields of a local farmer and, much like you as a child, only see you and Joebin about once a month. You have had two other children since that time, so your daughter is the one who helps to care for them during the day while you work. Joebin is working less and less these days – spending the money he earns on alcohol. At 23 years old, you can't imagine the life you once thought you might have. Each day is only harder than the next. You wonder how you will ever make it different for your children.

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India #5

That first meeting was the best thing that ever happened to you. The microfinance project is sponsored through Catholic Relief Services and the person who helped set up the project in your area was great. You have been a part of the project for over three years now and it has helped you and your neighbors a great deal. You started a small store with the \$150 that you borrowed and the success of the store allowed you not only to pay back your loan in a year's time, but also allowed you to save money.

Part of your loan payment each month went into a savings account and you were able to use that money the next year to expand your business. Because of your success, you are helping other women to become part of the project. You continue to save money because you want to make sure that you and Joebin will be able to support your family without needing your children to work, like you did. You want them to be able to go to school and learn. You work hard every day to make things better for your children. You know that this is the best you can do for them.

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India #6

You didn't really believe enough in your own skills to go to that first meeting about the microfinance project and so you went back to work for the farmer you had worked for previously. Again, you found yourself in the fields, herding the cattle, this time with your own child next to you. It seems that no matter how your life changes, you are destined to spend your days in these hot and dusty fields. Although some of the other women of your village have made great successes of their businesses, you still find yourself unable to take the risk of joining the microfinance project. It seems like nothing will ever change in your life, and you are tired of getting your hopes up.

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India #18

You spent the summer learning and preparing, and this year has been wonderful. You teach about 25 students each day – of all different ages and levels. The methods that you learned are making it possible for the children to each learn at their own pace. It is your job to teach new material to the students, either individually or in small groups, and then the students practice and continue to learn in their own small groups. You are also working with some of the parents during the night to help them learn. You are happy to be able to help the students of this village. Before you came, no one in the village was going to school because the school was too far away and you can see that you are making a big difference in the lives of these families. You go to bed each night exhausted but happy.

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India #20

You have been working at the convent for the past two years. They have been good years because you love the nuns and the children, but it is a lot of hard work too. Trying to feed 50 children everyday with very little food is hard. You are getting to the age when you would very much like to marry, but you are at a great disadvantage. Because you are estranged from your family, there is no dowry for you. (A dowry is a gift that your family would give to your husband's family when you marry.) Without a dowry, there are few families that will accept you as a wife for their son. Although you are glad that you got the education that you did, you now realize that leaving your family may prevent you from ever having one of your own. You wonder if you will spend the rest of your life taking care of other people's children.

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India #11

You leave the factory and the child advocate that you meet made arrangements for you to live at an orphanage. Your room and board is paid to the school through the donations of a family in the United States. You are so happy to have this family willing to help you. Each month you write them a letter and they write back quite often too. Now that you are studying English the letters are getting more and more interesting. You don't know how you will ever be able to pay them back for their kindness, but you try to make sure that they know how much you appreciate their help through your letters. You are not sure what the future will hold, but you are glad to be out of that factory and to have people in your life who care about you again.

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India #12

You live and work at the factory for three years until you are fired. Your hands became too large and clumsy to do the work fast enough. Without any warning, you are told to leave both your job and your home. You have nowhere to go. You are only 17 years old and have no job, no home, and no family. You spend your days on the streets of the local village, stealing enough food to live. The future does not look hopeful.

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India #21

One of your friends was killed last week by a crazy man. He just attacked her and raped her and she ended up dying behind the station. You are scared! Your other friend has run off – you think she ran away with a man. You are living now in a parking lot near a temple, trying to beg from the tourists and worshippers. Things aren't going well. You think that you will have to end up being a prostitute like so many of the others who live near you. You hardly sleep at night anymore because you are afraid of ending up dead like your friend. You never thought life would be this hard.

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India #8

You can't believe how lucky you are. You are living at a home called Jeeva Dhara. You live with 15 other girls and about 40 boys. You and the other girls are learning how to sew clothes so that you will be able to work in a factory or perhaps start your own business. The teachers take really good care of you and the priest that invited you to live here is so generous and nice. Tonight you are having a party for some visitors from the United States. They are part of a group from Catholic Relief Services that helps to fund Jeeva Dhara. You get the chance to dance with some of the other students on a stage and there is music and singing. It is a great night. You are determined to use this opportunity to do something good with you life. You feel like you got a second chance!

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India #9

Your boyfriend marries you, but it is not what you thought it would be. He has become very angry lately and sometimes beats you. You get so sick from selling blood that finally you just have to stop. You thought that you would start feeling better, but you haven't yet. You are afraid that you might have HIV. You know that some of the others who have been selling their blood have gotten the virus, and you know those that take the blood use the same needles over and over. You really hope you don't have it, but you have no way of knowing. Maybe in a few more months you will feel better. For right now, however, you need to find a way to make some money so that your husband will stop threatening you. You can't even remember a life other than this.

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