

The Woman with no Face

By Jason B music artist from Australia
www.myspace.com/jasonbofficial and www.jasonb.com.au

I wouldn't trade being a musician for anything in the world. Performing music takes me far away from my home in Australia to some awesome places. Ask any musician who has been on tour and they will tell you, you should always be prepared for the unexpected. (Check out the movie "This is Spinal Tap")

On one of my South Pacific tours I had to wear a suit and tie to sing at the royal palace for the King of Tonga's birthday celebrations. In Vanuatu I did a gig where people showed up in canoes and drank coconuts.

But nothing could prepare me for the day I met a woman with no face...



I was in India, the world's second largest nation. Over 1 billion people live in India and it's a nation destined to one day be a world super power. In addition to performing my music at concerts, *(above)* my tour included sampling delicious curries, *(right)* riding the Rickshaws and learning what life is like for many Indians who live in extreme poverty. More people live in poverty in India than there are people in the United States.



One of my highlights was being shown around a hospital for the poor in Chennai. The hospital was founded by Dr Colleen M Redit. *(below)* Dr Redit is a New Zealand woman who left her birthplace to work

among the poor in Southern India 42 years ago. She encourages people in India and around the world to support her hospital and sponsor children and orphans in need. I quickly learned that



the work Dr Redit began as a woman in her 20s is today saving the lives of countless people who cannot afford the help they need. Dr Redit introduced me to a guide to take me on a tour of the 5-storey complex she overseas in down town Chennai. *(left)*



I was shown the pharmacy that provides medicine for people who cannot afford it. (*above left*)
 I visited the dental surgery where simple procedures relieve a lifetime of toothaches. (*above right*)
 I saw the orphanage where children sleep on the floor in the corridors because there are not enough beds.



There was even a chemotherapy wing that offered hope for cancer victims from the slums. I met a little boy who with the help of a sponsorship program was able to have life saving heart surgery. (*left*)

Then I was taken to a door that read "Plastic Surgery Room".

I thought of the plastic surgery rooms back home. I remembered the "Extreme Makeover" TV shows where the 'average looking' are transformed into movie stars. "What is such a room doing in a hospital for the poor?" I wondered. "Are people getting nose jobs?"
 All was about to be revealed...

The door opened, I walked in and stood before a *woman with no face*.

When I say "no face", I mean "NO face."

On the bed before me lay a woman who had no flesh where her mouth, nose, lips and cheeks should be. Her youthful face had been replaced with the image of a skeleton. I could see the bones of her jaw holding her teeth in place. Her eyes and the top of her head were covered by a large bandage. Her arms were tightly wrapped and her hands were swollen. It took a few seconds for the scene to sink in. It was like entering a dark room and slowly letting your eyes adjust to the light. My mind struggled to imagine what terrible incident had occurred to leave such vicious scarring.

Standing beside the woman's bed was her mother who began to speak to me. She spoke Tamil so I couldn't understand but my guide started to translate her story.

It was no accident that the *woman with no face* was in hospital.

She was a victim of an horrific act of domestic violence commonly known as an "acid attack". Acid attacks are usually perpetrated by men against women or children. Common battery acid or sulphuric acid is poured on the victim. Often the attacks occur in the night while the victim sleeps. The result is excruciating pain and permanently scarring. Many victims become blind.

The guide told me that this woman's family was unable to pay their share of her wedding dowry and her husband had thrown acid on her as punishment.

Her mother began to weep. It was a pain filled cry full of sorrow. As each teardrop fell, I watched her

gently gaze at her daughter.

The *woman with no face* began to move. She lifted her bandaged hands up as if to greet me, her unseen guest.

"She is thanking you for visiting," my guide said.

I put my hands together and bowed as is the custom though I knew she could not see me.

"Vanakkam," her mother said, giving me the Tamil greeting.

"Vanakkam," I replied.

I left the room.

I left the hospital.

A few days later my music tour ended and I left India.



But I cannot forget the *woman with no face*.

How do you forget someone who through no fault of their own has had their life robbed from them? The woman may never smile. She may never marry. She may never have a peaceful night's sleep again. She may never see.

She is part of my world now.

She is that reminder that the world we live in can be a cruel and harsh place.

A place where serious acts of violence occur and too many of the vulnerable suffer.

Yet also a place where simple acts of kindness and charity go a long way. A place where the same \$10

bill that will buy me lunch in one country can save a life in another.

I met a *woman with no face*.

She is part of my world now.

She is that reminder that every day I am alive I have much to be thankful for.

Even if all I have is a roof over my head,

Or a toothache fixed,

Or a doctor to visit,

Or my eyesight intact.

As I woke up this morning and looked in the mirror, I remembered her.

Somewhere in this big world we all share, she is rising too.

Will she look in the mirror like she used to as a child?

If she is blind will she ask someone to help her through the day?

Tonight I will go to sleep in a warm bed.

Somewhere in the same world, little orphan children will lie down on a concrete floor in a corridor as their bed. *(right)*

Not far away, a little sponsor boy will rest with a healthy heartbeat.

The *woman with no face* will lay her head down too.

I wonder if her sleep will give her rest from the pain her body feels by day?

Or will she fear the nighttime that brought such horror to her life?

Musicians meet a lot of people on tour. Some can say they never forget a face. I'm not sure I can say that but I can say...I will never forget a *woman with no face*.



By Australian music-maker Jason B. His web page www.jasonb.com.au features his 'feel good' rock/pop music and has photos and videos of his music tours. More information at his myspace music page: www.myspace.com/jasonbofficial and www.jasonb.com.au