



WORDS michelle de crane PHOTOGRAPHY kenny braun

## caroline boudreaux the miracle foundation

**I LOVE MY BED.** It's my favorite thing in my house. It's got one of those great pillow top mattresses, with 300-thread count sheets and tons of pillows. Getting into it is like sinking into a cloud.

Now imagine that your bed, if you want to call it that, is nothing more than wooden slats hooked together and mounted on a crude frame. It looks like a picnic table. When you lay down on it, your bones make a "clacking" noise against the raw wood. There are no sheets, no pillows, and certainly no pillow top mattress. But you're grateful for it—it means you don't have to sleep on the ground.

That's what Caroline Boudreaux, founder of The Miracle Foundation, encountered at the Servants of India Society orphanage on what started out as a pleasure trip in 2000. Caroline, 34, and her best friend, Chris Monheim, decided to quit their jobs and take a trip around the world. Taking turns, they chose countries each of them wanted to see. Chris was adamant about visiting India—she had been sponsoring a young boy named Manus through the Christian Children's Fund (CCF). She wanted to see if he had been receiving her donations. Caroline, however, was more concerned about the tan she was going to get—their first stop was a beachfront flat on the South African coast.

Fast forward to May 14, 2000, ironically Mother's Day in the United States. After meeting Manus and seeing how well the CCF had taken care of him, Caroline and Chris were invited to the Director's home for dinner. More than 100 orphans greeted them at the door.

"I couldn't believe that I was looking at so many laughing, happy, filthy, parentless children," Boudreaux says. "I had never thought about orphans before, much less held them. They had nothing. And then I met Sheebani Das. When I had to put her to sleep on those wooden slats they called a bed, I broke down and knew I had to do something. She truly changed my life."

Sheebani was found abandoned in the bushes when she was five days old. Like 80 percent of the orphans in India (650,000 at last count), Sheebani was unavailable for adoption. Her parents did not sign a relinquishment. The government gives the orphanage \$6 per orphan per month for their care, although it costs \$40 a month to provide the basic needs of food, water, clothes, school, and medicine.

After meeting Sheebani, Caroline was overwhelmed. At the coffee shop where we spoke, her eyes still well up with tears as she talks about it. She knew she had to help children like Sheebani, but didn't know how.

"The next leg of our trip took us to Nepal," she says "and Chris encouraged me to write down everything I had seen and any ideas about how I could help in my journal. I began a 'stream of consciousness' list that included such things as 'join the Peace Corps, move there, send money,' etc., but when I wrote the words, 'open an adoption agency' I knew instantly that's what I was meant to do."

Upon her return to the States, she founded The Miracle Foundation because, as she says, it would take a miracle to help those kids. Keep in mind that Caroline had absolutely no idea where to start. Before she left on her trip, she'd spent seven and one-half years selling advertising for KTBC/Fox television. So she asked lots and lots of questions and talked to everyone she knew. Eventually, she ended up at Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) in Houston.

"They told me that, if I really wanted to do this, I would need to put in 10 hard years before I started seeing results," she said. "And I committed to that. But we've only been incorporated since November 2000 and we've already started seeing things happen!"

In fact, The Miracle Foundation just received its first grant from the Strake Foundation. They've also decided to move from the adoption side to more grassroots, helping curb the problem of unadoptable orphans before it happens.

"Our cornerstones are the Insure-A-Bed program and the sponsorship program," she says. "With Insure-A-Bed, a pregnant woman is assured a real bed, proper medical care, food and a job at the orphanage so that she can have a healthy baby, all for just \$110 a month. If she chooses to put her baby up for adoption, that child will be adoptable. But if she doesn't, she will be guaranteed a healthy child who will have a better shot in life. Right now, we have room for 20 women, but only enough money to help five.

"The sponsorship program is our biggest push," she continues. "It's less expensive and can help more children who are unadoptable. For just \$45 a month, someone can sponsor a child. Their donation provides medical care, schooling—education in India is neither free nor guaranteed—clothes, food, and toys. But most importantly, the child gets hope. They know that somewhere, someone cares about them. They began to feel they're not disposable."

With approximately 85 percent of the money The Miracle Foundation raises going to direct benefit, Caroline knows she's making a difference.

"When I was at Fox, I was making a whole lot more money than I am now," she says. "But although I may not eat as well as I used to, I sure sleep a lot better."

Caroline tells me a story she now lives by. To paraphrase a fable from Anthony De Mello's, "Song of the Bird", a man walking through the forest saw a fox that had lost its leg. He wondered how it lived. Suddenly, a tiger approached with food in its mouth. The tiger ate what it wanted and left the rest for the fox. The same thing happened the next day. The man decided to test his faith by simply waiting to be provided for, having confidence that he would be rewarded. He did this for many days but nothing happened. When he was almost at death's door he miraculously came to the same conclusion that Caroline did after meeting Sheebani.

"I finally realized I'm supposed to be the tiger," she says.

Learn more about sponsoring a child at [www.themiracle-foundation.com](http://www.themiracle-foundation.com).