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July 2008

Vol. VI, No. 11

Caroline
BOUDREAUX
THE MIRACLE FOUNDATION

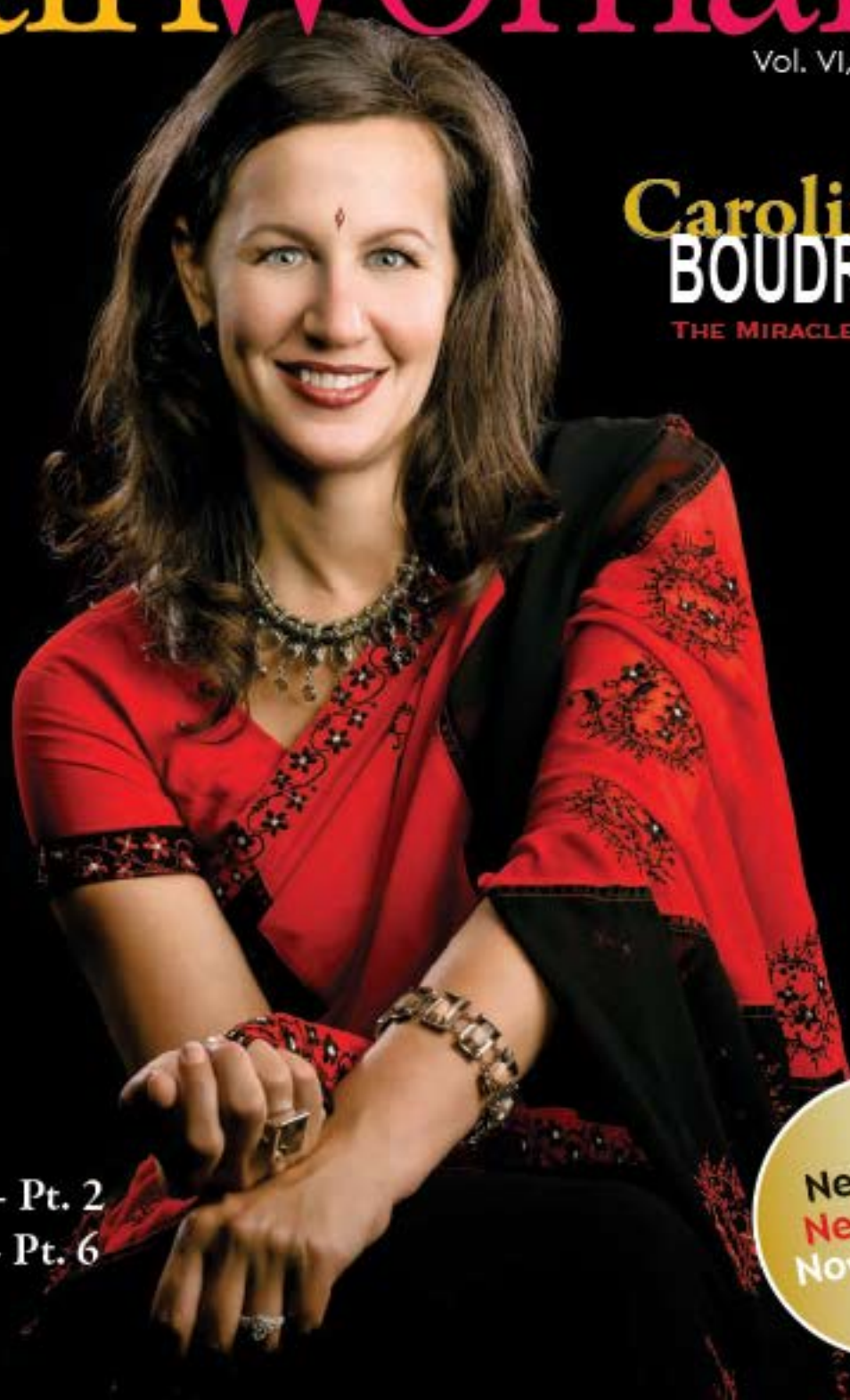
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Caroline Boudreaux amidst a myriad of photos of the Indian children whose lives she and The Miracle Foundation have dramatically transformed.
Photo by Michael Thad Carter.
Hair/Makeup by Rebecca Glen Pate.

Caroline BOUDREAUX

THE MIRACLE FOUNDATION

All Signs Point to the Children

Story by Christine Cox

Photos by Michael Thad Carter, Svetlana Frolova and
Courtesy of Caroline Boudreaux

THE SIGNS POINTED IN THE SAME DIRECTION FOR CAROLINE Boudreaux. Sometimes, their meanings were ambiguous. More often, they were more clearly written, in bold letters, with impeccable timing. There are those, including Boudreaux, who would call these messages answers to her prayers, or divine intervention. Others would say serendipity, chance, even luck. But the plainest explanation for all of the fortuitous coincidences that led Boudreaux to India and the children and her true life's work could be simply attributed to good, old-fashioned perseverance and hard work.

Herein, the cliché bears itself open. Boudreaux was living "the American Dream" - a young woman, just under 30, earning a six-figure income selling media for the Fox Network, living in one of the best parts of Austin, bestowed with a natural, hazel-eyed Cajun beauty. That is nothing, if not advantageous. For many women, all of this would have been enough. But as the century was turning, Boudreaux was feeling inexplicably empty, and was becoming more and more restless. "I kept thinking to myself, if I just got a bigger house, a different boyfriend, maybe then, I would be happy."

It was many years since Boudreaux had graduated from LSU Shreveport in Louisiana with a degree in psychology. She is the sixth of seven children from a formidable Catholic family in Lake Charles, LA. Boudreaux's father was a pharmacist, and her house was run on a strict routine and a shoestring budget. "Making sure everyone was fed and educated was the most important thing. My life was almost rote, it was so predictable," she >>



LEFT: Caroline at her 8th grade graduation.
CENTER: Caroline at age 1.
RIGHT: Caroline at her First Communion.

remembers. Having been educated in parochial schools and taught at the hands of nuns her entire life, Boudreaux well understood the importance of charity and the meaning of self-sacrifice. Still, she professes, when she thought of what she 'wanted to be when she grew up,' she had no inclination toward philanthropy or working in the not-for-profit arena. "I just saw myself succeeding financially. And even when I did, I never thought of giving my money away. My goal was to make a six-figure income. I had reached that goal. So, I had no idea why my job, my great Westlake place, my nice car - none of it

"Those were harsh words," remembers Boudreaux, "but, admittedly, I knew I needed to hear them." Shortly after that visit, Boudreaux found herself alone one night, lying on her bedroom floor crying her heart out, asking God to send her some sort of sign, about what he wanted her to do with the rest of her life. "I wasn't particularly religious, in spite of my upbringing and all those years of Catholic school. I rarely went to church or even thought about my spiritual self. But I knew, on some level, that my friend was right, and that something in my life was fundamentally wrong."

"But I knew, on some level, that my friend was right, and that something in my life was fundamentally wrong."

was making me happy. I just knew something crucial was missing." Then, she had a visit from an old college friend, a woman several years older than her. "I expected her to be so impressed with me, with how far I'd come since college, because I had so much stuff!" Instead, the friend, speaking candidly one afternoon as they were browsing in Whole Foods, had an entirely different impression of Boudreaux's life in Austin. "You know, Caroline, you've changed. I think I liked you better in college, when you were poor." And that wasn't all she said. "You've gotten far away from God. Really far."

And so began a global journey unlike many others, and one that has brought Boudreaux, now nearly a decade later, to a place beyond her wildest imagination. And all she had to do, besides reexamine and alter her entire life, was to pay attention to the signs.

In September of 1999, not long after Boudreaux's visit with her opinionated college buddy, she was asked by a coworker over drinks at a local happy hour to accompany her on a trip around the world. "I heard the idea and I was in!" remembers Boudreaux, thinking this could be a way to help her find some answers to her

personal crisis, or maybe just some excitement. So she and her friend Chris Monheim went back to her place and spent the evening with a bottle of wine and a world map spread across the floor. Monheim and Boudreaux planned to spend time over a year in several different places, like Bali and Nepal. Monheim had been sponsoring a young boy in India through the Christian Children's Fund (CCF) for several years and wanted to meet him. They had been corresponding, and he had sent her photos and little drawings. That visit was to be one of the goals of the trip. Boudreaux admits to being skeptical that the boy even existed, believing somehow that "they give the same photo to everyone who sponsors a child over there."

Boudreaux quit her lucrative, nine-year position at Fox in January of 2000. "It wasn't a difficult decision," she explains, "but when I told my uncle about it, he said, 'you're making the biggest mistake of your life.'"

As it turns out, Boudreaux was making a decision that would dramatically transform not only her own life, but also the lives of hundreds of people.

After traveling for several months to Thailand, Indonesia, Israel and Egypt, Boudreaux and Monheim were ready in May to go to India to meet Monheim's sponsored child. (The Christian Children's Fund, incidentally, does not actually facilitate your sponsorship of an individual child; rather, the donor's money goes to a fund that helps a village maintain its essential operations like electricity, water and staples. The sponsorship of an individual child is merely symbolic of what you are doing to help the people of the village where the child resides, and helps you establish a personal relationship with a child in the area.) At that point, Monheim was beginning to balk at the idea of traveling to such a rural area, and considered sending the \$750 it was going to cost for the traveling to the fund instead. Boudreaux would hear nothing of it. "We'd come this far to meet that little boy - for gosh sakes, I wanted to go make sure that he actually existed," Boudreaux laughs.

And so, the journey that would extract the cynic from Boudreaux forever began.

"We went to meet the little boy and saw his village. He had kept every letter and every memento Chris had ever sent him." The little boy, whose name is Manus, had parents and three siblings and they lived in a mud hut the size of a bathroom. The adults slept sitting up at night because there was not enough room for everyone to lie down. "Little did I know," Boudreaux says, "that little boy was one of the lucky ones."

It was May 14th, 2000, and Mother's Day was being celebrated with expensive gift-giving and extravagant meals back in the U.S. The Director of the CCF, Damadoor Sahoo, invited Monheim and Boudreaux to his home for dinner that evening. "It was 119 degrees that day," Boudreaux recalls with a grimace, "and of course, there was no air conditioning, no respite. So, we agreed only reluctantly to his invitation." (Boudreaux jokes that in India everything is hot but the showers.) Monheim explains, though, that in fact, the conditions in India are rough in general. "The people there are struggling to survive. When you come back to the States after a trip like



TOP: The Boudreaux Family - Back row: Anne (standing) Andre (being held), Leneta, Robert, Alyce-Elise, Damian; Front row: Claire, Caroline, Douglas. ABOVE: Caroline and her fiancé Ed Goble in Playa del Carmen. (Boudreaux and Goble are getting married on the 4th of July.)

that, everyone seems spoiled and ungrateful. People in America complain a lot about nothing."

They arrived at the home of Sahoo and according to Boudreaux, the shocking scene they walked into was much like what Auschwitz must have been. "Our host opened the door, and over a hundred orphaned children, starving for affection, greeted us," she recalls. "If you so much as touched their hands they would plead for more. It was like they were drowning as they reached out to us, pleading all at once. They were filthy dirty, excruciatingly thin, and big-eyed with longing." Sahoo served the adults chicken, but the children had little bowls of rice with sugar, which they ate with desperate relish. The whole experience was intensely heartbreaking, Boudreaux recalls.

Later, at about 9:30 that night, one of the little girls came over to Boudreaux and put her head down on Boudreaux's knee in a vie for affection. The entire world for Boudreaux seemed to >>



shift at that moment. "I picked her up and she just pushed her head into my chest. I sang her a lullaby, and she fell asleep in my arms. Then, when I went to put her down, it was in a crowded, 10x10 room filled with rickety, wooden, slatted beds." Boudreaux pauses, noticeably shaken by this memory. "The stench in the room was horrifically unbearable. There were 30 beds, with no mattresses or pillows or blankets, and when I put the little girl down to sleep, I could hear her frail bones literally make a grinding sound against the bed. And I thought 'this couldn't be more wrong.'"

To see a short film about The Miracle Foundation, (produced by Turk Pipkin of the prestigious award-winning feature documentary *Nobility and The Nobility Project*), entitled *One Child at a Time*, go to www.nobility.org, or call The Miracle Foundation office at 512.329.8635 to get a copy.

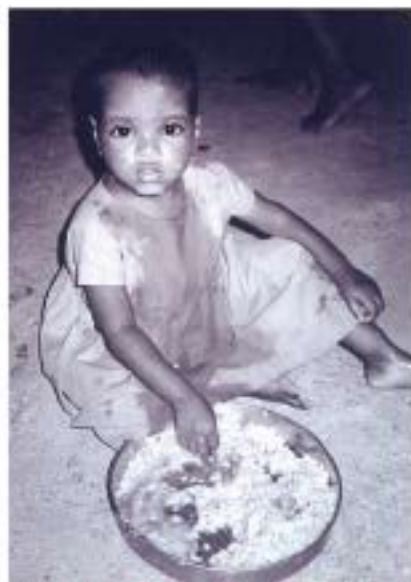
It was in that moment Boudreaux realized she had no choice but to find a way to do something to affect change in the lives of these lonely children. She didn't know what yet, she only knew that the little girl, whom she still sees and adores, and all of the babies in that home, deserved something different.

In June, Monheim and Boudreaux decided to take some time to travel alone. So Boudreaux spent 21 days in Nepal praying and

reflecting on what she would do next at this juncture of her life, since the revelatory event in rural India. "I decided if I couldn't fix what I saw," she remembers, "I would die trying."

When Boudreaux returned to the States, though she still had enough money to live on, she decided to work part-time for some of her ad agency contacts, helping them sell advertising. With the second half of her days, she would do research and begin planning for what she hoped would one day be an adoption agency - something to facilitate placement into homes for the parentless children she'd met. The process was arduous due to the mounds of paperwork and red tape involved. "I was told that I would have to wait at least 10 years to see any real results, and that it was just too hard to start an adoption business."

One evening, driving home after a frustrating day, she had another talk with God. "I asked him to send me a sign if he wanted me to keep trying to make this work. When I finally went to my front door, there was a framed photo on my step of me with some of the children from the village orphanage, with a little sticker on it reading, 'You can do it!'" Monheim, now more like a sister than a friend, had left it there for her. This was an obvious answer to her plea. Boudreaux decided again not to give up, no matter how unrealistic the dream. So back to work she went, reading policies and procedures manuals and studying how to get through the bureaucratic maze of adoption licensing. She called a woman who was referred to her who knew a lot about how to form an adoption agency. The woman came to visit, took one look at Boudreaux and what appeared to be her 'cushy' life, and told her to give up - she didn't have what it takes to make something this difficult come together. "Caroline is a headstrong person. She doesn't give up on anything easily. So her perseverance was never a surprise to me." >>



LEFT: Sheebani Das, the little girl who stole Boudreaux's heart that night over dinner. CENTER: The beds in the room where the children slept - the room that changed Boudreaux's life. RIGHT: Monheim (left) and Boudreaux were greeted ceremoniously by the children when they went to visit Manus (seated to Monheim's left), Monheim's sponsored child.



Monheim remembers. The woman's skepticism challenged Boudreaux to try even harder. She began writing her own policies and procedures manual, applied twice for the license only to be turned down, and was at a breaking point again, when someone gave her a tip. She was told to put gold government stickers all over her papers, so they would go through quickly. It worked. And with the signature of an Indiana Congressman, in June of 2003, she was ready to begin her international adoption agency. So Boudreaux returned to India. And all she saw were red flags and corruption in the process. Everywhere.

"I came back to the U.S. thinking this has all been for naught. I was so devastated." In the meantime, Boudreaux could not pay her next mortgage since, after 9/11 had hit, her advertising sales business had gone south. "So I got an interview for a sales position with CBS. I knew I would get the job. And I knew I would hate it. But I had to take it. I was stone cold broke." At this point, Boudreaux had another serious chat with God, this time in the shower. "I told him I would need another sign, right away." At this same time, Boudreaux had been regularly attending a women's prayer group. They knew of her struggle, and were empathetic and supportive. So, that evening, Boudreaux went, despondently, to her prayer group where one of the women there, Dee Dee Stone, approached her. "My husband and I have a foundation, and we're so inspired and impressed by the work you've done, we don't want you to give up." And she handed Boudreaux an impressive check. "Pay your mortgage, and keep going," Boudreaux remembers her saying. She was stunned. She literally had the job interview scheduled in two days, and would have taken the position out of desperation. She was ready to give up her dream entirely. But this sign couldn't be ignored. "Still, I knew I would have to alter my way of helping the children. I just didn't know how, yet."

**"I decided if I couldn't fix what I saw,
I would die trying."**

Boudreaux thought to call Allen Graham, the man who founded and directs the nonprofit organization Mobile Loaves and Fishes, for which Boudreaux had been volunteering. "I need help," she told him. "Then he asked me a strange question. He said, 'What do you think we do here?' I said, 'You feed homeless people,' thinking how silly it was for him to ask."

Boudreaux was wrong. Graham told her that indeed, they do not 'feed homeless people.' "We enable 9000 volunteers to serve and fill-up their God-shaped hole."

It was a total paradigm shift for Boudreaux. Graham advised her to shelve the adoption idea for now and start a sponsorship program to facilitate people's ability to go to India and see the orphans and their conditions. He told her to begin building a board of directors. He helped her with banking and developing a business plan.



Caroline in India getting ready for the grand opening of Sooch Village.

For Information on how you can donate, sponsor a child, or go on a trip to India to see and work in the orphanages The Miracle Foundation has established, go to www.miraclefoundation.org or visit the office with its staff and many volunteers hard at work at 1506 West Sixth Street, or call 512.329.8635.

He taught her about non-restricted and restricted money. He became her mentor in building this whole new project that would soon become, aptly, The Miracle Foundation.

And so, Boudreaux began by inviting all of her friends and media contacts, of which she has many, to a fundraiser in November of 2003. In that first effort, she raised \$75,000 and found sponsors for 25 kids. The Miracle Foundation was formed with its fundamental philosophy based on the Children's Bill of Rights, ratified

in 1989 by the United Nations, and with the physical model of each orphanage following a blueprint borrowed from the SOS-Kinderdorf International model, an orphanage started in 1948 after World War II. The standards of each orphanage are extraordinarily high, but attainable, and today, The Miracle Foundation has built seven of them. The foundation's goal is to develop a watchdog system whereby these standards and measurements are applied to orphanages all over the world. One million children, just in India, become orphans every year, and there are 25 million in the system already living in sub-standard orphanages with deplorable conditions, a number equal to the population of Texas.

Boudreaux will be married on the Fourth of July to Ed Goble, associate athletic director of business operations at UT, who is now wholeheartedly involved in her work. She has the nice house, (currently being remodeled), a reliable car, an enviable wardrobe, and a purpose that transcends anything she could have ever imagined for herself, and more importantly, for the children she has come to learn to honor and care for in the most personal way possible - through her tireless efforts in forming and operating The Miracle Foundation.

"I'm not special," Boudreaux claims. "Anyone can do what I'm doing. Just sponsor a child!" ★

MORE INFO

The Miracle Foundation
1506 W. 6th St.
512.329.8635
www.miraclefoundation.org

For more information on the SOS-Kinderdorf International project, visit www.sos-childrensvillages.org

For information on Mobile Loaves and Fishes, visit their website at www.mlfnow.org