

In 2009, I joined the Stand Tall Project to go to Sichuan, China and had the experience of my life.

I never really thought of what I would expect before I arrived - Rubble? Tents? Destruction and chaos? When the news media broadcasted the aftermath of the earthquake on that fateful day, it shook the world, it shook me. Charities immediately launched appeals for donations and volunteers, most of which were perfectly successful, but when



would we actually see the difference made? When would we ever actually know how much our contribution has affected each individual victim? Would we ever get the chance to take their hands in ours, to see the mounting determination in their eyes and feel the reassurance, knowing that even after all that

they've lost, they can somehow find the strength in themselves to stand tall once again?

A year ago, I would have been sitting in my air-conditioned living room, remote control in hand and saying, "Never." without even a breath of hesitation. But right here, right now, after experiencing the highs and lows of my trip to Sichuan, I say, why not now?

Many people have offered their money to those affected by the earthquake, then charities materialize donations into all forms of help. Some build homes, some give out food and drinks, some bring messages of care and



love. As necessary as these all are, they do not offer permanent relief. Stand Tall, however, brings the gift of hope to those who need it most. This was precisely the hope that was lost when the victims were buried by the tones of concrete that crashed down upon them.



Primarily, Stand Tall recruits medics and engineers to produce tailor-made state-of-the-art prosthetic limbs for amputees. But when I arrived at the Stand Tall campus, I knew that it was so, so much more. People of all ages with prosthetic legs were running around, balancing like pros on bicycles, even playing tennis! To think that they escaped the clutches of death a year ago was unbelievable.

To be able to join the family of Stand Tall in their quest to bring hope was simply an honour. The staff knew everyone personally, gave constant support and help to those who needed it, and even fooled around in wheelchairs. Before long, I was distributing beads and pieces of string to everyone around a table, eager to bring more smiles to everyone's faces. While they were busy threading bracelets for each other, I was shown into the room where all the prosthetics were made.



This was simply the origin of hope for all the victims. I offered to help make a prosthetic leg. It took all day and it was hard work. To think that there were around 60 victims outside, dozens of them who were growing adolescents who needed their prosthesis to be replaced and repaired every month, I can't help but admire the

small handful of "engineers" in that tiny room.

The next day, I was able to fit the prosthetic leg I helped build onto the stump of a teenage girl. As it clicked into place, I helped her up. At first, she stumbled, unaccustomed to the new fitting. As I glanced up, I saw the determination in her eyes as she stood tall and proceeded to walk a perfectly straight line. At the end of the session, she handed me a bracelet she made the day before, then thanked me with a smile on her face.



I spent one afternoon making a teenager's life a bit more comfortable, but I saw the difference I made. Looking around and hearing the horrific stories of survival, I saw the difference Stand Tall has made. These bags have been embroidered by the Szechuan earthquake victims who are all beneficiaries of the Stand Tall program. Each stitch embroidered on these bags, represents the pain and loneliness the victims are suffering. Please help take it away by buying a bag. I promise you will make a difference in someone's life.

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