

Impoverished women can get your goat



BARB GUY

Last Christmas I was given the back half of a goat. And a silver bracelet. Granted, I wear the bracelet more, but while it is handmade and engraved with the word for peace in nine languages, and while half the profits from the bracelet were donated to charity, the goat is saving a family.

The back half of this goat (and the front half, which, luckily, was given to the same family) produces one ton of milk each year. The family can make cheese, yogurt or butter, and they can sell what they don't need. One little goat can improve a family's circumstances in ways Americans can't comprehend.

In one astounding success story from the goat people (www.heifer.org), a Ugandan girl named Beatrice Biira was the recipient of a goat, just as someone was on my behalf (or

half my behalf). The goat, bred to produce massive amounts of milk, raised the nutritional standard for Beatrice's entire family and created a significant income.

Beatrice was finally able to have her first day of school at age 10; now she's in college in the United States and she's been featured on "60 Minutes" and in a best-selling children's book. She plans to use her education to start a school for disadvantaged Ugandan children.

She owes it all to the goat.

International Women's Day on Wednesday, March 8, is a national holiday in many countries. It is a day to consider the status of the world's women. Don't expect the women in developing countries to stop and reflect, though. Their day never ends, and not in the way yours or mine doesn't.

In their honor, a few facts and figures from international relief agencies:

- Asian and African women are generally responsible for collecting water for their families. They may walk five to 10 miles, wait in line - maybe for hours - wait for the water to trickle into the container, and carry the heavy container back to their homes. Every single day. Then

the work of cooking, cleaning and family care begins.

- Worldwide, more than 60 million girls are not in school. In South Asia, 66 percent of unschooled children are girls.
- More than 140 million African women have been genitally mutilated.
- Approximately 75 percent of the estimated 60 million displaced persons from conflict and disasters worldwide are women and children, who often face sexual violence and abuse.
- In Mozambique, the average girl gets three years of schooling in her lifetime.
- In Bangladesh, 28 percent of women are literate (58 percent of men).
- In Uganda, 91 percent of women do backbreaking agricultural work.
- In Ethiopia, one woman in nine dies in childbirth.

Most women who head families like the one that got my goat will never live as long as I have. At 45 years of age, I have already exceeded the life expectancy for the average woman in several countries. That same average woman is almost certain to be illiterate.

The Salt Lake Tribune

I cannot begin to imagine never having read a book. In college, a book on the fate of women around the world chilled me with this devastating opener: *There is no major field of activity and no country in which women have attained equality with men.* Then again, women don't need to be literate to know that.

Barb Guy writes a regular column for the Opinion section. © Salt Lake Tribune.