



THE OPRAH WINFREY SHOW

JANUARY 16, 2004

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JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 1

HOST: Oprah Winfrey

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Ellen Rakieten

LISA LING: INVESTIGATES DOWERY DEATHS

OPRAH WINFREY: An all-new OPRAH: Lisa Ling on special assignment for us. Brides burned alive by their husbands. It is happening now.

Ms. LISA LING (Host, "National Geographic Ultimate Explorer"): She has burns on over 60 percent of her body.

WINFREY: Body parts sold on the black market.

Ms. LING: Why did you do it?

WINFREY: And then, I promise you this is a story worth watching. Pregnant so young, their bodies literally break.

In labor...

Dr. CATHERINE HAMLIN: Yes.

WINFREY: ...for six days!

One of the most extraordinary women you will ever meet. You need to know her.

Whoop, whoop, whoop! Hey! Hi. Whoop! OK. Have a seat, everybody. Have a seat.

I always say this, that if you are a woman born in the United States, you are one of the luckiest women in the world. Did you know that? Well, if you didn't know that, you're really going to believe me after this show.

Imagine a place where it's not out of the ordinary for a husband to set his wife on fire. It's not out of the ordinary. It's true, and it is happening. Today I wanted to take you to the other side of the globe, so all of you soccer moms out there, here's a chance to go places you'd never normally see and have an opportunity to meet women you'd never meet.

Throughout the year, journalist Lisa Ling is on special assignment for the OPRAH show. We're so happy about that. Hi, Lisa.

Ms. LING: Hi.

WINFREY: And one of the things Lisa's doing is traveling the world to uncover untold stories that I believe all of us need to see, because I believe awareness, knowledge is power, and no matter what is going on in your life, if you are more informed about what's happening in the rest of the world, that informs your life. So Lisa says that her first investigative report, called bride burning, is so disturbing that it's given her nightmares. This sounds like something out of the Dark Ages, but it's happening today.



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 2

Ms. LING: We're now in Bangalore, which is one of India's most developed cities. And even here, hardly a day goes by without a report of a death related to dowry.

This is Donna Fernandes. She runs a women's organization here, and she is going to show us today how severe the problem of dowry death is.

WINFREY: Reports say that thousands of women are killed every year in dowry-related tragedies. When families refuse or are late on dowry payments, many times their daughters pay the price. Tragically, many of these young brides are burned alive in their own homes. The reason these women are killed or severely injured is because once the money runs out and the bride's family has no more to give, the husband's family wants to make way for a new bride and a new dowry. And when asked what happened, those who survive will say a stove burst or a kitchen accident to avoid further torture.

Ms. DONNA FERNANDES: We are horrified with the kind of histories that the parents reveal to us.

WINFREY: Until something is done, the numbers will only continue to rise.

Ms. LING: According to this billboard in the middle of town, an average of 700 to 800 people die in traffic accidents in Bangalore every year. Now roughly 1,200 women in Bangalore alone die every year of dowry-related deaths, but apparently, that's not worthy of a billboard.

WINFREY: Not worthy of a billboard an--mainly because why?

Ms. LING: Well, it--this happens so frequently, the--the deaths directed toward women and--and--dowry related, and you just don't hear about it. The stories are buried in the papers.

WINFREY: And it's because also the families are anxious to get their daughters married.

Ms. LING: Well, marriage in India, in many ways, is seen as a transaction. Women are--are a burden to their families, and so they're anxious to get them married off. But then what happens is the women become burdens to the husband's family, and so it just gives you a sense of their role in society.

WINFREY: And so this dowry system is ancient, so...

Ms. LING: It's been going on for--for a long time, and it's not exclusive to India. What's happened in India, though, is it's just taken on such gruesome consequences.

WINFREY: OK. Lisa took her camera crew inside a burn ward for a rare face-to-face meeting with women who are victims of bride burning. No one usually talks about this freely because if the women do talk, they could very well be killed. Today this is what can happen when dowries are not paid in full.

Ms. LING: We're in the emergency part of the burn unit, and almost all of



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 3

these women have come in within the last couple of days, and the burns on these women are just excruciating.

WINFREY: Lisa says the stench of burnt flesh was overwhelming and the sound of their pain was heartbreaking. On any given day, at least three to four new women are admitted to the hospital with more than half of their bodies burned. This woman says her mother was the victim of a stove accident in her kitchen, a story many of them tell but nobody believes.

Ms. LING: Sattia works with Donna and she says that every woman in here says she's here because of a stove burst, but, Sattia, how many do you really believe are here because of a stove burst?

SATTIA: In this ward, I don't believe at all a stove burst as such.

WINFREY: Today all of the ward's 27 beds are full, and each of these women have a tragic story behind their burns.

Ms. LING: Janiki is 23 years old and she has burns on over 60 percent of her body. What Sattia has been able to ascertain is that the husband was demanding property, and when she said no, he allegedly poured kerosene over her.

Does she still want to go back to the husband?

SATTIA: Yes.

Ms. LING: She said she wants to go back?

SATTIA: Yes, she wants to go back.

Ms. LING: This woman's husband threw kerosene on her when she was cooking. She says because she didn't have the food ready on time, but Donna says that the economic pressure had been building up, and now she's here.

WINFREY: And while the volunteers work tirelessly to save these women inside, outside husbands have surrounded the hospital gate demanding to see their wives.

Ms. LING: Very often the husbands or the husbands' families will show up and they'll put pressure on the women to not speak freely about what happened.

WINFREY: Finally, security forces the men to leave. As the days pass, these women and their families are left to cope with an uncertain future.

Ms. LING: The women who survive...

Ms. FERNANDES: Yeah.

Ms. LING: ...what happens to them?

Ms. FERNANDES: You're a--you become a burden. You become a nuisance. They feel neither accepted by their family nor the husband nor by society even.

JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 4

Ms. LING: From the second I walked into this room, I felt like I was in a place where a war had struck, but the reality is that many of them will not even live to leave the hospital, and this happens every day.

WINFREY: So according to Donna Fernandes with the Vimochana wo--women's organization that you just saw there, sadly, since Lisa went to that hospital, all of the women that you saw in those beds have died. So...

Ms. LING: And it is so deeply tragic, but in some ways, death is actually a--a...

WINFREY: Yeah.

Ms. LING: ...better option because the few women...

WINFREY: Than that kind of suffering, yeah.

Ms. LING: Yeah, the few women who do survive, they end up having to go back to their own family's home, and they're seen as a burden, as I said, and they can never get married again. They can't se--can't ever get a job, and they're just completely ostracized from society, so...

WINFREY: OK. So we're trying to understand, because I think we used to have dowries in this country, did we not? Women would save and hav--bring their little...

Ms. LING: Their parents would give gifts and so on.

WINFREY: ...little linens and things. Then they developed a store called Linens 'n Things and you didn't have to do that, but--OK. So that system sort of carried over culturally for American women in the pioneer days for a while.

Ms. LING: Yeah.

WINFREY: And now the system there is, is that you give the dowry--a lot of families sacrifice everything they have, and often...

Ms. LING: They...

WINFREY: ...that's not enough?

Ms. LING: They save all of their lives. They--they make a presentation to the husband's family, and sometimes a husband's family will continue to demand dowry even years after the couple has been married.

WINFREY: How--how can they do that?

Ms. LING: They just do.

WINFREY: They just do.

Ms. LING: They just do or they threaten the woman with death. And, you know, an economist will tell you that India's economy is--is growing rapidly,

JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 5

and one would think that that would improve the situation for women, but in fact, it's made the culture more materialistic and the pressures even greater.

WINFREY: OK. And I've heard that the more el--eligible the husband or the groom, the more the family has to pay.

Ms. LING: Yeah, it's crazy. Some--some families believe, 'Well, we educated our son at Harvard, so that means we're entitled to more dowry.' It's not--it's--it's completely illogical.

WINFREY: It's crazy. That's why you're a lucky girl if you're born here.

Ms. LING: Absolutely.

WINFREY: OK. Lisa says that many Indian families are aborting their baby girls to avoid the financial strain of a future dowry. So they're doing that because it's, like, the elimination of women because women have no real value.

Ms. LING: Yeah, I mean, given the pressures that--that--that families have when they have girls, it--it makes you think: Why would you want to have a girl in this society when are--all you're going to have to do is pay? But there are definitely people who are--are working tirelessly to change that. It's just a very slow process.

WINFREY: OK. So it's going to be--this isn't going to change in our lifetime, is it?

Ms. LING: I don't--it's--it's hard to say. I mean, so--some of the women I--I did meet, the woman, Donna, from the Vimochana, she--these are ball-buster women.

WINFREY: Yeah.

Ms. LING: They are very, very serious and very passionate, and they are going to change India, and hopefully, it will happen within our lifetime.

WINFREY: Well, look at this five-year-old girl. Her harrowing story about the day she was nearly burned alive. We'll be back.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: This makes you think about your own life, whatever your marital situation is, because interestingly enough, first of all, you're marrying somebody you don't even love.

Ms. LING: Yeah.

WINFREY: You barely know the guy. You've got to pay him a dow--dowry, and then if it's not enough, he can kill you.

Ms. LING: That's right. And--and that's why...

WINFREY: That is not a good deal.



Ms. LING: Yes.

WINFREY: Any way you look at it, that's a bad deal. Jou...

Ms. LING: That's why a lot of the women try to kill themselves, in fact, as well.

WINFREY: Journalist Lisa Ling left her cushy, glamorous job at "The View"--You all remember her on "The View"--to travel--I can--this is such a long way from "The View," honey, I can't even tell you...

Ms. LING: I know.

WINFREY: ...to travel to perilous parts of the world and bring attention to important stories that go unreported. And we recently sent Lisa to India where she found out about bride burning, also known as dowry deaths, and we did this because, you know, I just believe that it's important for us who are particularly women people on the planet to know about the conditions of other women around the world, not that we don't care about men, too. But I think as a woman, it's--it's our responsibility.

One of the things she discussed, the horrible, vicious crime of--of bride burning that's happening to thousands of women every year. It's dangerous for a woman in India to talk about this, but in a rare interview, Lisa did talk to a mother and daughter, both victims of this brutality. Women don't speak up very often.

Ms. LING: We've been invited to Uma's mother's house. Uma lives with her now with her daughter, Sheta. Both of them were burned by Uma's husband. She was a little reluctant about us going home with her today because it's her parents' home, and she feels like she's a burden already.

WINFREY: Uma says her husband continued to demand gold and other high-priced items from her family after they were married. When her family could not pay, her husband asked for a divorce.

Ms. FERNANDES: What sparked up the burning was that he was insisting on her signing the divorce papers which she was refusing to sign.

WINFREY: Then the unthinkable happened. Uma's husband set her on fire, a gruesome crime known as bride burning. Sadly, her frightened young daughter was burned as she tried to save her.

Ms. FERNANDES: When she saw her mother on fire, she went and clutched the mother.

WINFREY: Lisa's interview was cut short because family members were upset that Uma was sharing her story.

Ms. LING: Something unusual just happened which is as we were interviewing Uma, some of the relatives who live right around here started getting very upset. In fact, one of the uncles is yelling right now. So I think we're going to leave now because the relatives are continuing to be upset.

JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 7

WINFREY: Lisa said, 'I'm getting out of here.'

Ms. LING: This was...

WINFREY: And wh--why were the family members...

Ms. LING: This was...

WINFREY: ...yelling at you?

Ms. LING: This was an unbelievable story. You know, there was some commotion outside, and the family members were upset because they said by bringing attention to the fact that we have this survived burned woman, our daughters, our younger daughters, may not have a chance to get married. I mean, this woman truly, because she survived, lives in the shadows, and her daughter--five-year-old daughter, Sheta--you know, normally when we take cameras to another country, the kids are a little shy at first, but then they open up to us. They like to see themselves, you know, when we play back on the monitors. This--this child was so afraid, she was constantly hiding behind her mother. And it was--you know, no five-year-old should have to suffer that humiliation.

WINFREY: And a lot of the parents, the relatives feel embarrassed that the daughter's marriage has failed. Instead of feeling whatever compassion for her, because she's been burned...

Ms. LING: Absolutely.

WINFREY: ...they're upset because the marriage--it means the marriage is over.

Ms. LING: Yep, they--they see it as a burden.

WINFREY: OK. Twenty-one-year-old Nisha Sharma is an inspiration Lisa met on her trip. Her bravery is helping women across India begin to take a stand. Take a look.

Ms. LING: We're in a town just outside of New Delhi, Indian, and we're heading over to meet a 22-year-old woman who did something so unprecedented here that she became a hero.

WINFREY: Over 1,500 guests were gathered under a huge white tent. Everybody waited for Nisha Sharma to walk down the aisle. After placing an ad in the classified seeking a husband for their daughter, Nisha's parents thought they had found a good match.

Ms. NISHA SHARMA: He had a good personality. We all were impressed with him because he came in a black coat, looking decent.

WINFREY: As Nisha prepared for her big day, her father was busy stockpiling expensive gifts for her husband's family--two washing machines, two refrigerators, two home theater systems, a flat-screen TV, even a luxury car. But on their wedding day, Nisha's groom wanted more.





Ms. LING: So he was demanding about \$25,000 on the wedding day?

Ms. SHARMA: Yes, he was demanding that much money.

Ms. LING: Twenty-five thousand dollars.

WINFREY: Nisha's father refused to meet the groom's demands and a fight broke out moments before the wedding was to begin. When Nisha heard her father had been shoved and spit on, she did the unthinkable in India. She called the police and had the man she was about to marry arrested.

What Nisha did may not sound shocking, but in a country where speaking up can be deadly, Nisha has given women a voice. And now more and more women across India are taking a stand and saying no to dowry marriages.

Wow. That's incredible. And all it takes is one person to do it.

Ms. LING: By just calling the cops, Nisha became a hero in India, and so many women have since followed suit, and you know, when--when they are pressured for dowry, they called the cops.

WINFREY: And her father had saved 10 years to pay for her dowry?

Ms. LING: For all of those gifts that she was going to give to the husband's family.

WINFREY: So you say that Nisha believed that that groom that spit on her father was planning to kill her?

Ms. LING: She was afraid that--that he could very well kill her. I mean, it happens so frequently, unfortunately, in India, and when he started to harass her father, when she thought, 'What could this guy do to me?'

WINFREY: Now what happens to the men who do the bride burning?

Ms. LING: Wow. That's a very interesting question. If they can confirm that the husband was responsible, he'll be arrested. There's a very low conviction rate. And often they will arrest the husband's entire family and put them all behind bars. Whether they're convicted or not is--is--is to be seen, but I spent some time in an Indian prison earlier last year, and it was not uncommon to see entire families, mother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, fathers, all in prison for dowry deaths. So they--they are taking some action, although the conviction rate, as I said, is--is not so high.

WINFREY: Well, coming up, people are so desperate for money, they're selling their body parts for cash. We'll be right back.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: Imagine a place where one way to get out of debt is selling a kidney. Throughout the year, Lisa Ling is here with us and--as an investigative reporter doing stories that we think that you should know about, like this next one. During a recent trip to India for "National Geographic



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 9

Ultimate Explorer," which is her other job, too, Lisa made an appalling discovery in a poverty-stricken village.

Ms. LING: A lot of people in India sell their kidneys for cash, and we're wanting to visit one of these villages here in Madras because apparently in this particular village, a lot of people have either sold theirs or are wanting to sell them.

WINFREY: In this poverty-ridden village, people are so desperate for money that selling a kidney has become quite common.

Ms. LING: Moda said that she's so desperate, if we paid her now, she's ready to give her kidney right now 'cause she's so deeply in debt.

WINFREY: Lisa learned that many people fear talking about this dangerous practice.

Ms. LING: The problem is that word has gotten out that we're coming, and the people are a little nervous. They probably don't want us here, because what they're doing is--is illegal.

So the way it works is a broker will typically go fishing in a village like this. Brokers will come in and they will start asking around for people who are interested in selling their kidneys. And if they're healthy enough, they'll--he'll take them to have a blood test.

WINFREY: A broker can make thousands of dollars off of one kidney, but the donor usually doesn't see much money. Vijay lives in a one-room house with her husband and two children. She sold her kidney for only \$800.

Ms. LING: So you sold your kidney 5 1/2 years ago. Why did you do it?

VIJAY: (Foreign language spoken)

Unidentified Man: They had a lot of debts.

Ms. LING: Oh, well...

Unidentified Man: He was given the kidney.

Ms. LING: You sold yours, too?

Unidentified Man: Yeah.

Most of them who donate their kidneys are desperate because they have huge debts. So most of them leave, if they can't repay, they commit suicide and kill themselves. And so, otherwise, the only option to live and repay down loans is to sell kidneys.

WINFREY: And who are they selling them to?

Ms. LING: Well, the--the list for kidney donation is--is very, very long. There are thousands of people who are waiting for kidneys all over the world.

JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 10

And so these people who--who sell their kidneys on average for about \$800--I mean, their--their kidneys fuel this--this--this market.

WINFREY: Yeah.

Ms. LING: The kidney issue is an interesting one because it's banned in most parts of the world, but if you can--if you can donate a kidney in an altruistic way, why shouldn't you be able to sell it as well? So it--it raises an interesting question and issue, and--and...

WINFREY: Yeah.

Ms. LING: ...my hope is just that by bringing these stories to an American audience, we can just get a better appreciation and understanding of what the rest of the world goes through.

WINFREY: Yeah.

Ms. LING: I hope people--I hope people like to watch this and--and--and familiarize themselves with these issues.

WINFREY: I don't know if the word is like.

Ms. LING: Like is not a--like isn't a word...

WINFREY: I don't think the word is like, but the reason why--it's like reading a book about something else in the world that's not about you and not about your life. So even when you're driving down the street or going to the laundry or doing your mundane things--I--I know from my experiences in Africa and other parts of the world, every time I turn on the water, I think about how valuable that is. I think about the women that I see--I have seen getting up at 6 in the morning walking six miles or, you know...

Ms. LING: And it...

WINFREY: ...18 kilometers...

Ms. LING: Yes, and, Oprah...

WINFREY: ...just to carry water, and I--you know, now, you know, as I'm brushing my teeth, I turn the water off. I used to let it run, run, run. Now I think, 'Oh, boy, let me save this water.'

Ms. LING: And--and that's why I--I feel honestly...

WINFREY: Yeah. Yeah. It's true.

Ms. LING: ...so honored to be working with you an--and this show, because there's so much crap on TV. I mean, there really is. And yours is one of the few shows that really...

WINFREY: Thanks.



Ms. LING: ...it's true...

WINFREY: Thank you.

Ms. LING: ...expands consciousness about the world.

WINFREY: Yeah. And so, yeah, that's why I think women should care about what's happening in the rest of the world and--because--and I keep saying women, although we do have men here, but I think women--I think even men would agree that women are the real nurturers of the world. And when you want real change to happen in a nurturing kind of a way, in a compassionate kind of way, I think looking to women first is one of the best ways to get that done...

Ms. LING: That's right.

WINFREY: ...and then we have to bring the men along with us and get them inspired. Yes, so why do you think women should care?

Ms. LING: I just feel like we're so kind of apathetic, myself included, in this country. We--relative to how people live around the world, we have pretty comfortable lives. I mean, our struggles are--are certainly serious, but I just think it's important for us to be aware. That's it.

WINFREY: Now you can see more of Lisa Ling's special "Sell Yourself For Cash." That's on MSNBC's "National Geographic Ultimate Explorer." That's January 18th at 8 PM Eastern and Pacific time. It's really eye-opening.

Thank you so much...

Ms. LING: Thank you.

WINFREY: ...for doing this for us.

Coming up, a story that will break your heart and make you feel grateful at the same time. Back in a moment.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: You know, we all get so caught up in the stresses of our daily lives that it's hard sometimes to take time and think about what a day would be like for a woman struggling to survive and just get through each day in a Third World country. But when you hear this next story, I hope you'll take a moment to count your own blessings, girls.

This terrified 12-year-old girl is being forced into marriage, a common practice in the African country of Ethiopia. If she's like many girls in these small villages, she'll soon be pregnant even though her small and underdeveloped body is not ready to give birth.

Many of these girls, some as young as 13, struggle with labor for days without medical assistance and usually deliver a stillborn. But that is just the beginning of their nightmare, because the trauma of labor rips apart their insides, leaving these girls to drip a constant stream of urine that follows



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 12

them wherever they go. They develop an internal hole called a fistula. And no matter how hard they try to stay clean, they smell of waste. Most become social outcasts and are abandoned by their husbands, families and villages. Often believing that there is no cure, they're then left to live alone in despair for the rest of their lives.

When Australian gynecologist Dr. Catherine Hamlin first came to Ethiopia, she thought it was for a short trip to help set up a midwifery school, but when she saw these suffering young women, her plans changed.

Dr. HAMLIN: The previous gynecologist had said to us, 'Look, the fistula patients will break your heart. You can't really do anything to help them.' And so we were determined to try to do what we could.

WINFREY: It's estimated that 9,000 young women develop fistulas in Ethiopia every year. Catherine knew a surgery that could cure these girls and restore their dignity.

Dr. HAMLIN: So while you were pushing, pushing and pushing, you pushed a big hole in your bladder. And if you look at this bit of paper, you'll see the big hole. The good news is that we're going to be able to mend it. Just a few stitches and it'll all be mended.

WINFREY: Making it their life's mission to help as many of these girls as possible, Catherine and her late husband moved to Ethiopia and opened the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, helping thousands of women in the last 30 years. Every morning, desperate girls arrive at the hospital, hoping to be cured. Most of them travel for days to meet with this compassionate healer that many call St. Catherine. She insists that nobody is turned away and treatment is free.

Dr. HAMLIN: We try to admit as many as we can at once because they've made a journey from the country. Often, they've had to sell an animal, a--a cow or a sheep to make the bus fare, or they've even just begged.

WINFREY: After treatment, every girl leaves the hospital wearing a new dress. Catherine wants to make their return home special.

Dr. HAMLIN: We give them this new dress to make them feel they're starting a new life.

(Foreign language spoken). That doesn't go.

It's very important for their morale to make them feel they're going back to a fresh start.

Now we're very excited to see you all going home looking so beautiful in your lovely new dresses. When you get home, everyone will come out and there will be a great feast. There'll be dancing, and everyone will be happy.

WINFREY: Please welcome Dr. Catherine Hamlin.

It's wonderful to see you. It's wonderful to see you.



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 13

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you.

WINFREY: Good to see you.

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you very much for asking me.

WINFREY: Dr. Hamlin, thank you. Thank you, Dr. Hamlin. This is Lisa Ling. Lisa Ling. Have a seat.

We will talk to Dr. Hamlin as soon as we come back. And we'll hear the story of this woman who lived alone in a hut for years. We'll be back. Be right back.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: Australian gynecologist Dr. Catherine Hamlin has devoted her life to helping girls and women in Africa whose bodies have been ripped apart by childbirth. Without medical help, their injuries never heal, which makes them drip a constant stream of urine and waste. They're labeled as social outcasts, and most live alone because of their foul odor. Dr. Hamlin's clinic travels to remote villages to help women who have no idea that there is a cure for this devastating problem. On this visit, they find Marjo sitting alone in her hut.

Unidentified Woman: How old are you?

MARJO: (Through Translator) I think 20-something.

Unidentified Woman: How many children have you had?

MARJO: (Through Translator) Six.

Unidentified Woman: How many of them are alive?

MARJO: (Through Translator) One. The rest all died.

Unidentified Woman: We can do an operation and mend the hole completely. Then you can be a normal person again. You can sit with the people without any smell. Would you like that?

MARJO: (Through Translator) I would be so happy to visit people again.

WINFREY: Next, they meet Hawa.

HAWA: (Through Translator) The problem began after I was in labor for six days.

Unidentified Woman: Was the child born alive?

HAWA: (Through Translator) No, he was dead. It's difficult. I can't hold my head up. I'm frightened. There's nothing I can do about it.

WINFREY: Hawa and Marjo are treated the next day, and their surgeries went



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 14

well. One of Catherine's great success stories is Mametu Goshe. She came to the hospital when she was only 16 and has been there ever since. Now in her 50s, Mametu is a skilled surgeon and has cured hundreds of patients in the last 30 years. Mametu wanted to thank Catherine for saving her life, so she recorded this special message for her.

Ms MAMETU GOSHE: I want to thank you, Dr. Hamlin. You changed my life. You are a wonderful woman. When I am thinking about you, it makes me cry. You are like a mother to me. I am missing you so much. Come home soon.

WINFREY: This is Dr. Catherine Hamlin, and she--she's a woman that we thought you needed to know about, because she has spent nearly 50 years of her career helping these very young women in Africa be reintegrated into society because they're--they become outcasts and, as the woman we saw, live alone, are shunned by their families because, you know, there's this foul odor, and nobody know--until you came along, knew that there was a cure for it. So congratulations to you. God bless you and all your work.

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you, Oprah, very much.

WINFREY: God bless you...

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you.

WINFREY: ...for the work that you do. We noticed in the tape that the girls are so young. They're beautiful and so young.

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. Girls in Ethiopia, especially the north of the country, do marry early. They be...

WINFREY: What is early? What is early?

Dr. HAMLIN: Well, they might be betrothed at eight or nine, but they don't go to their husbands--they don't have sexual contact with their husbands till puberty, but they often go to live with the in-laws when they're young.

WINFREY: Like eight or nine?

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. They might be taken from their mother and father and taken to the in-laws' house.

WINFREY: So that's why earlier in the tape we saw this 12-year-old girl. So even--they're--they're--they're...

Dr. HAMLIN: Crying, yes.

WINFREY: ...through puberty, even when they're too y--just start to become pubescent, they are having children, and their little bodies aren't ready for it.

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. Legally...

WINFREY: And is that part of the prob--that's part of the problem, 'cause



they're too young and they push...

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes.

WINFREY: ...and they push, push and they create these holes.

Dr. HAMLIN: This is because--the two great causes of obstructive labor are small pelvis or a malposition of the baby inside the mother's uterus. In Ethiopia, she can't get any help. She's got nobody in the village, no ante-natal care, no midwife to help her, no--nothing.

WINFREY: No epidural.

Dr. HAMLIN: Nothing.

WINFREY: Nothing.

Dr. HAMLIN: Only just...

WINFREY: And so--so--so when the woman says she's in labor for six days, she means she is in labor for six days!

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. Imagine a little girl living in a hut in the country away from any main road; she's looking forward to having her first baby, she's--it--one of the unfortunate 5 percent of all women in the world that get into obstructive labor, whether you live in America, Europe, Africa, she's one of the 5 percent that gets stuck. She doesn't know when she starts her labor nor do the village women know. They encourage her day after day after day. After five days, she delivers a stillborn baby. The only reason she can deliver is because the baby inside the mother gets smaller when it's dead and she can push it out as a piece--as a dead baby. And she thinks, 'Well, never mind, I've got the baby out. Maybe next year I'll have a live baby,' but she wakes up to a worse horror, finding her bed soaked in urine and sometimes bowel contents as well. And day after day, this continues.

WINFREY: And that's because all of that pushing has created that hole.

Dr. HAMLIN: A hole.

WINFREY: Yeah.

Dr. HAMLIN: A fistula is just a hole between an internal organ and the outside world. The internal organ is the bladder or the rectum and the outside world is the birth passage. So everything is coming out without any control.

WINFREY: So she wakes up, bed covered in urine or waste...

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes.

WINFREY: ...and that just continues because that hole is always there.

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. And she thinks maybe in a day or two it'll dry up. She





JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 16

lies curled up in bed thinking, 'Well, perhaps tomorrow it'll stop.' Her husband comes home from the fields. He's a farmer boy. 'Why is the house smelling like this?' She says, 'I don't know, but I can't control my urine.' And day after day, this goes on. Finally he says, 'I can't stand this smell. I'm going to give you back to your mother and father.' Her mother and father love her. She struggles home, and they run--they put their arms around her and hug her, and then they find out that she's smelling. None of the neighbors will come to the house. And they--the father says, 'Let us build a little house for her to live in, a little room somewhere on our family plot.' So they put her into a shed, and there she will stay for the rest of her life unless she can be cured. She's ruined. A beautiful girl of 16, 17, early 20s with no hope of being cured unless she can get some doctor to mend her.

WINFREY: Isn't it true that often these women, when they come to you--We were seeing on the tape--they walk for days to get to you...

Dr. HAMLIN: Certainly.

WINFREY: ...and had to sell whatever they had?

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. They're poor.

WINFREY: The family sells the cow or...

Dr. HAMLIN: Poverty is an enormous factor in the formation of the fistula. They are so poor, they have no hope of making a journey in a bus even unless their hus--unless the father will sell something or the young brother will go to the market and sell a goat or a cow or a sheep to raise the money for the bus, and then she will--may have two days' walk to get to a main road, and then the bus will pass and she'll get on the bus. And then the busman says, 'You're smelling,' or the other passengers say, 'You're smelling. Get off.' Two of them we had once that sat on a tin at the back of the bus hoping the urine would drip into the tin so they wouldn't be noticed. So their problems are enormous.

WINFREY: And how is it that you're ev--you turn no woman away ever?

Dr. HAMLIN: We treat them all freely because they're poor. They've got nothing.

WINFREY: And how are you funded?

Dr. HAMLIN: We beg.

WINFREY: You beg.

Dr. HAMLIN: My--my husband used to say we're professional beggars.

WINFREY: You beg.

Dr. HAMLIN: And we lead...

WINFREY: And so you begged your way to helping 24,000 women. What do they



call you?

Dr. HAMLIN: They call me mother usually.

WINFREY: They call you mother, yes.

Dr. HAMLIN: And I don't know. They just--they're--they're so grateful. These--we're not patching up old people for a few more years. We're giving a young, beautiful woman a new life, and this is why I stay in Ethiopia. I love them. And just--you'd love them, too, if you could see them. They're beautiful women, and they're so appealing. They've lost everything. They've got shame. They come through the gate with their heads down, and they're so pleased to meet other girls with the same condition.

I had one woman, she was hiding in a monastery for 14 years. She came into the ward, and she said, 'Why, the whole world is here,' she was so excited that there were other women with the same condition. And this is why it's so important to nurse fistula patients in a special ward or a special hospital ideally...

WINFREY: Because...

Dr. HAMLIN: ...because the others--the other patients who are not fistulas will despise them and even...

WINFREY: Because of the smell?

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. They will even be turned away sometimes by the guard at the gate. They're in rags. Their clothes are soaked in urine. They've got nothing except faith and hope and urine-soaked clothes. And to turn them away is so common in a general hospital. That's why we built our hospital.

WINFREY: I heard you were nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for this work.

Dr. HAMLIN: I was, but I didn't get it.

WINFREY: Well, I believe that this is God's work on Earth what you're doing.

Dr. HAMLIN: I believe that God has put me there. I--I know that God is following these girls. He loves them. And I trust in God for the future. I'm old. I'm nearly 80, and I've got to--I've got to think of the future. Ethiopia is a very poor country.

WINFREY: Yeah.

Dr. HAMLIN: It's a beautiful country. But in 20, 30, 40 years...

WINFREY: And the people there are so beautiful...

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes.

WINFREY: ...I mean, physically beautiful, just gorgeous.



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 18

Dr. HAMLIN: But there will still be fistulas there when I'm gone many, many years, and this is why I want to be sure--this is why I'm talking to you, to make the American public aware that this problem is going on. Because it's a women's issue, nobody's done anything about it.

WINFREY: Right.

Dr. HAMLIN: If men were getting fistulas, something would have been done years and years ago, I think.

WINFREY: I--you--if a man had a hole in his penis, you're darn right about that. I mean, all the men would rise up to--even the men here know that, don't you think? If there was a problem with men with a hole in their penises, there would be a Hole In The Penis Committee developed immediately to fix that.

Coming up, what you can do if you want to help the women with fistulas. We'll be right back.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: Well, I said at the beginning of this show that if you are a woman born in America, you are automatically one of the luckiest women in the world, and by the end of this show, you would believe me.

Do you believe me now?

Audience: Yes.

WINFREY: You believe me now. So I think a lot of women watching have been so moved by hearing your story and what you have done, what you've dedicated your life to do, a lot of people will want to help. What can we do to help?

Dr. HAMLIN: The main thing is that we need money, because it costs us 450,000 US dollars every year to run our hospital. We have wonderful donors that do support us at the moment, but they won't go on forever. And I want to be sure that this hospital and this work, these new projects that we're running in the countryside, will continue after I've gone. I have five wonderful doctors to follow me and a wonderful staff who are dedicated to help these women, but without money, we can't keep going because these women can pay no fees, nothing, and this will go on for many, many decades long after I've gone. The fistulas will still be there. And I want money for--invested for the future of this hospital, and...

WINFREY: Yeah. How long does a woman have to stay when she comes there?

Dr. HAMLIN: It depends on the injuries. Sometimes we can cure them in 10 days. Three weeks is the average stay. Some of these girls have terrible, crippling injuries as well. Nerve damage from the baby's head pressing on the spinal cord for so long, they become paralyzed, their legs, their feet. They lie in bed thinking, 'If I keep very still, the urine will dry up.' They get contractures of their knees and hips and wasting of the legs. They can't walk. They're carried in on the backs of their fathers. So they might be



there for two or three years before we can do their vaginal injury repairs.

WINFREY: Really?

Dr. HAMLIN: It can be the most challenging surgery.

WINFREY: Really?

Dr. HAMLIN: The whole vagina can be destroyed.

WINFREY: We'll be right back.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: Lisa just said during commercial break what I think I was--what I know I was thinking and I'm sure many of you, and that was we love the fact that you give them a new dress to go home. You give them a new dress and--and fare to take the bus home, correct?

Dr. HAMLIN: Yes. This is important, because just to say, 'You're cured, go home,' they might just stay in the streets of Addis Ababa and become another beggar or a little girl prostitute. So we make sure they get on the bus to go to their villages, and we give them a new dress. We let them choose the colors they want. We sometimes give them...

WINFREY: We saw you take the yellow back.

Dr. HAMLIN: We sometimes...

WINFREY: No, you get the blue. You don't get yellow. Yeah.

Dr. HAMLIN: We give them a little talking to. We give them a card which is--describes what we've done, the surgery, and we say, 'This is a very special card. When you get home looking so beautiful in your new dress, there'll be one young man at the village who will say, "I'd like this girl for my new wife," and he will take her to his home and marry her, and we encourage them to marry. A girl of 16, if you say, 'You can't ever be married again,' is terrible. And so we say, 'You must get to a hospital or you'll get the same thing again.' And we say, 'When the baby starts walking in your stomach, you start walking towards a hospital, and show the doctor your card, and he will take care of you. He will do a cesarean section or he will do some delivery to give you a safe delivery and get you a beautiful live baby,' or...

WINFREY: We'll be right back. Thank you so much, Dr. Hamlin.

(Announcements)

WINFREY: So, Lisa Ling, take care of yourself as you travel the world...

Ms. LING: Thank you.

WINFREY: ...for National Geographic and for us. Thank you so much.



JANUARY 16, 2004  
Page 20

I was just saying to Lisa, there's nothing we can do about the dowry situation in India, but I think just being aware of it makes us more enlightened people. But if you would like to--if you've been moved by what you heard by Dr. Hamlin and you want to make a contribution, you can go to [fis--fistulahospital.org](http://fis--fistulahospital.org) or go to [oprah.com](http://oprah.com) for more information.

I thank you so much, Dr. Hamlin.

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you very much.

WINFREY: Thank you. God bless you. God bless you.

Dr. HAMLIN: Thank you.

WINFREY: Thank you so much. Good.

We'll be after the show on Oxygen. We'll see you there.