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## Hope blooms in the Himalayas

Vt.-based father and son sell pressed flower cards made by Garhwali women

By L. MICHAEL BOHIGIAN  
INDIA New England Correspondent



Images courtesy of EVAN GOLDSMITH/HOPE FOR WOMEN

**B**URLINGTON, Vt.—Evan Goldsmith had a childhood dream to reach the Himalayas. When he graduated from Bucknell University in 1992, he spurned the fashionable three-week backpack trip to Europe that crowns the summers of so many young college grads, and bought a one-way ticket to New Delhi. On this sojourn east, Goldsmith wandered far and wide. He visited Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, and Japan with the ultimate goal, at which he succeeded, of reaching the Himalayas in northern India.

Captivated by what he saw in this poor region of India, Goldsmith says he soon immersed himself in the culture, finding work with two non-governmental organizations dedicated to development programs for women.

Goldsmith's stay lasted two years, a time in which he became deeply attached to these struggling women and a time in which he cultivated the seed of an idea that ten years later would help them rise.

Now age 36 and living in Burlington, Vt., Evan Goldsmith has recently partnered with his father, David, 66, to form a father-son enterprise, Hope For Women, a company that sells fair trade greeting cards adorned with dazzling dried and pressed flowers, all made by the women in the Indian region where Goldsmith once lived.

In the mid 1990s, the women of this region, the Tehri Garhwal District in the state of Uttaranchal, were working on projects that dealt specifically with pressed flowers—projects that planted the original seed in Goldsmith's mind.

As the only westerner living in this area, he says he soon felt a deep connection to the native

Burlington, Vt.-based company Hope for Women sells greeting cards made by women in the Himalayan region of Garhwal. The cards are made by pressing leaves and flowers from the region, and are available online and at retail stores.

women, who were living with scarce electricity and minimal resources.

"They kind of became my second family," says Goldsmith. "I was living with incredible people who were the most giving people I've ever been around."

According to Goldsmith, most of the men migrate down to New Delhi to look for work, leaving the women to do everything from taking care of the children to cooking and tending the fields and animals.

"The days are very long and the living conditions incredibly hard," says Evan. "It's an area that is not an easy place to live, with little to no employment opportunities outside of agriculture."

Faced with the realities of these women, Goldsmith pondered real ways to work with this community and improve their living conditions. During this time, he was fortunate to find in his roommate Saji Kumar, a native who could speak five languages, including English, and a future managing director with Hope For Women, who now helps with the business in India and has become their "man on the ground."

When Evan Goldsmith decided to begin Hope for Women, he says he remembered the many visionaries like himself who had failed because they had plenty of inspiration but no business acumen. For this prize, Goldsmith had to look no further than his own father David, an entrepreneur with 40 years of business experience helping start-up companies get off the

ground.

After a few months of testing their professional compatibility, both men decided that the opportunity to work with each other for such a good cause was priceless. "It became a simple matter," says David.

Soon blossomed Hope for Women, which manufactures on the average 20,000 note cards a month. The company staffs about 20 to 25 women in India who use an artistic approach to create unique floral designs and themes—for example, themes on summers, winters, or holidays.

"There is nothing mechanical about the process," says David, who along with his son encourages the women to use their natural creativity.

The Goldsmiths abide wholly with fair trade practices, offering the women flexible schedules, more than fair wages, and most importantly, a clean and safe working environment. According to Evan Goldsmith, most of the women in the area do not have a formal education beyond a third or fourth grade level; most are in the lower Harjari caste; and many are divorced and living in one-room homes with their children earning equivalent of \$12 a day. However, the women who work for the Goldsmiths' enterprise can expect a stable wage five to six times that amount, and are seeing a considerable rise in their living conditions.

Evan Goldsmith speaks fondly of one of the women, Babali, who began working with

pressed flowers as a 12-year-old girl, who now, as a woman in her early twenties, married and with a child, has taken charge of the women's group in the mountains with a robust entrepreneurial spirit.

"I have full faith in her creativity and in her managing capabilities to make products that we can sell over here," says Goldsmith.

And the products are selling. The Goldsmiths run two business models concurrently. The original model sells cards in boxes on the Internet, while the latest approach, begun in the last few weeks with startling success, is the single card, traditional retail model.

The Goldsmiths have opened up distribution centers around the country—with retailers in Georgia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, including 10,000 Villages, one of the major fair trade retailers. The fundamental structure of their company is three-pronged and organic: high quality products that are a good value and which promote a social mission, said Goldsmith.

Together, father and son are looking beyond the scope of Burlington and the Tehri Garhwal district of India. They are hoping to make a global application of their mission. "We want to take this model and apply it to other women's groups," says Evan. "Not only in India with other products, but in different countries as well."

For more information on Hope For Women, please visit [www.hopeforwomen.com](http://www.hopeforwomen.com)



Evan Goldsmith (shown above) was backpacking in India when he first met the women who make the cards with themes such as "valley," "mountain," and "festival."

made by Garhwali women

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