



Lifeworks

# The hands of this child

It was his encounters with young patients injured on the job that spurred David L. Parker to begin a personal investigation into the working conditions of children. An occupational health physician based in Minneapolis, Parker travelled to Mexico, Thailand, Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Turkey and across the United States to document children at work. Seventy of his photographs form the centrepiece of *Stolen Dreams: Portraits of the World's Working Children*, an exhibition organized by the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature in Winnipeg. Archival material assembled by associate curator Sharon Reilly demonstrates that child labour is by no means remote from Canadian experience. Dating from the late 19th century onward, these photographs show children at work in mines and factories, on farms, in residential schools and on city streets.



David L. Parker

### Carpet weaver, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1993

"I remember seeing the hands of one weaver who was about eleven years of age and thought he had developed osteoarthritis. I was not sure. Then I saw the hands of this child that had a similar appearance. In many carpet factories lung infections are rampant. Other maladies included atopic dermatitis, lacerations that did not heal, and herpes." — David L. Parker



David L. Parker (detail)

### Brickworker, Kathmandu, Nepal, 1993

"Aarti is seven years old and works in a brick factory in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal. Aarti works eight to ten hours a day with her father. She began working at the factory when her mother died. Aarti makes between 1000 and 1500 bricks each day. The whole area where Aarti works is gray with dust and smoke. Thick black smoke bellows from the kilns' chimneys. There is no fresh water, only a dirty pond. One-room brick huts, where the workers live, are scattered around the area. In Aarti's hut, Aarti and her father and sister sleep on the dirt floor. Twice a day she gets a meal of lentils and rice — sometimes it's only rice." — David L. Parker

It was not until late in the last century that the combined pressures of the industrial revolution and social reform began to "undermine the generally held opinion that early initiation to work was both natural and necessary among the labouring classes," paving the way for the "first tentative efforts to restrict child labour" in this country.<sup>1</sup> Parker estimates that the number of children who belong to the world's labour force today may be as high as 500 million; his photographs bear sobering testimony to

the fact that, for many of them, legal and social protection from exploitation, injury and abuse is still the stuff of dreams.

**Anne Marie Todkill**  
Editor, The Left Atrium

### Reference

1. McIntosh R. Child labour in Canada: the case of the chimney-sweep. *Archivist* 1995;no 108:13-8.

### *Stolen Dreams* will be on tour at the following galleries in 1999:

- February:** Pembina Hills Art Gallery, Morden, Man.
- March:** Portage and District Arts Council, Portage la Prairie, Man.
- April – mid-May:** Heritage North Museum, Thompson, Man.
- mid-May – end June:** Sam Waller Museum, The Pas, Man.
- July–August:** Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, Man. (tentative)
- September – October** (to be confirmed)
- November 15 – April 15, 2000:** Ontario Workers Arts and Heritage Centre, Hamilton, Ont.