Geoffrey Roberts Award gets through to tsunami victims

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The winner of the 2005 Geoffrey Roberts Award, New Zealander Mary Taylor, used her travel bursary of £3,000 (nearly $6,000) to revisit some of the most remote fishing villages on the south coast of Sri Lanka with the specific aim of returning home and raising both funds and awareness of the island as a holiday destination. “I can honestly say that The Geoffrey Roberts Award changed my life”, she said at the beginning of this year 2006.

Mary Taylor, who had already visited Sri Lanka while working in the food business, reports, “Returning to Sri Lanka in June was wonderful and very sad. It was apparent that much of the international aid package had not yet got through, for a variety of reasons.” Since her return to New Zealand she has held a series of Sri Lankan-themed events, each of which has generated enough money to buy an oru, or traditional outrigger, as well as for funds for rehabilitation within the fishing community including components for nets, energy-efficient ovens, home garden developments and new bicycles. There are also plans to install refrigeration to expand distribution options for local fishermen.

The annual international Geoffrey Roberts Award, which commemorates the life of Britain’s pioneer importer of fine New World wine, is now in its eleventh year and applications are being sought for the 2006 Award. Full details of how to apply are at www.geoffreyrobertsaward.com. The Award is open to anyone of any age and location who can convince the judges, luminaries of the world of gastronomy, that they will spend their travel bursary in a way that is likely to make a positive difference to the worlds of food, drink and/or travel. Closing date 31 March 2006.

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