



Nightmare in Nepal

“They told us to watch the birds. It might be animal sense or pure superstition, but somehow the birds could sense the earthquake. A swarm of birds would darken the already ominous sky a moment before the shaking started. I watched the birds. In unison, they flew up from the trees and formed a big black cloud. The aftershock hit.”

Anna Kosa was in Kathmandu, working for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) when the terrible earthquake hit on April 25. Now that she is back home in Canada, she has shared her experience with TRAS.

“April 25, Saturday: 11:56am. I remember when the earth started shaking. At first, it was a low rumble, like there was a very large plane flying low and close to the ground. But as I looked out the window I saw the buildings outside swaying like grass in the wind. Then, the earth erupted. Think of how it feels to be on a boat, rolling in the waves. I was on a boat about to capsize. That’s what it felt like. I was aware that Nepal was expecting the ‘big one’, and it was always at the back of my mind, but I never thought it would happen while I was there for my six-month placement. But that’s the scary thing; you never know when it’s going to happen. Even now when I am no longer in Nepal, it still feels like the earth is shaking. I know it’s not shaking; however, after experiencing aftershocks for days on end it’s difficult to adjust to solid, unmoving ground.



READI Nepal children (see end of article)

Nightmare in Nepal cont'd...

I know that people are still living this nightmare. I am fortunate because I was safe, as were my colleagues. For five nights following the earthquake I slept on the ground. But I feel incredibly fortunate because I saw how kind the human heart is. I saw how people come together in a time of crisis. The people of Nepal are the most amazing and compassionate people I have ever met. After the earthquake, my Nepali friends and colleagues were genuinely concerned about my well-being while they were also going through the same tragedy. Today I heard of another 7.3 earthquake that hit Nepal. This news is absolutely devastating. **Keep all the brave people in Nepal in your thoughts and prayers. I will never forget my brave friends who stayed to help with the relief effort, and the millions of Nepalis who are rebuilding their lives while helping others. They are the special ones – their stories are the ones you should hear. So as the media moves on, please hold a special spot in your heart for Nepal. It is truly a spectacular place.**

TRAS has heard similar stories of the kindness of the Nepali people towards each other – they are all pulling together to help; for instance Mim Hamal, one of the READI Nepal directors who works in Kathmandu, volunteered to train and advise graduating students from a local school in relief work, sourced donations and together they have been helping 10 stricken villages.

All TRAS partners and the children and families whom our projects support are safe, thank goodness, and damage seems to be minimal. But just when things seemed to settle down, we heard on May 23 that a 4.8 tremor hit far away Simikot, the tiny town where READI Nepal looks after 30 children in a rented hostel and is giving them such a good start in life. They are all safe, but scared stiff, and are currently sleeping outside in two very old tents. Mim has again helped out – he has managed to find two good tents and was shipping them to Simikot last weekend. They have been planning to fundraise to build a proper hostel for the children – now they want to make sure it will be truly earthquake-proof.

TRAS starts a Nepal Rebuilding Fund

One immediate request we have had for help in rebuilding is from the Tibetan Department of Education (DOE) with whom we have supported many projects over the years. Tibetans in Nepal are in a tenuous situation at the best of times, and now that their villages and buildings have suffered so much, they are desperate for funds for rebuilding. The DOE looks after 12 schools in Nepal, and 4 of these are damaged, although thankfully the children are safe. They receive no help at all from the Nepalese government or from the large international aid groups, so are turning to their long-time supporters for help. Here, for instance, is a photo of the badly damaged outer support wall at the Atisha Primary School, in Jawalakhel, Kathmandu. There are 57 pupils there, from pre-primary to Class 5.



We expect READI Nepal will have costs related to last week's earthquake there, and as things get sorted out, we know we will hear of more needs. **Let's start a 'rebuilding and preparedness fund' to help our partners cope with the unexpected and difficult problems they are facing in putting their lives back together and preparing for a safer future. Please help them by making a donation to this fund. Mark your donation 'Nepal Rebuilding Fund'.**

Our goal is \$10,000 by the end of June. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Late Flash: North Vancouver students have already donated \$1,500 to this fund! (see North Vancouver students, page 3)

Coming Events

First, a non-event... We were about to advertise the next in our series of popular *Kick Off to Summer* dinners when the earthquake hit – and it seemed wrong to plan a party just then. The Nepalese restaurants in Vancouver were all holding fundraisers – how could we detract from their efforts? So watch out for our first *Kick Off to Fall* dinner sometime in October, a good time to re-connect with members, directors and friends.

We are thrilled that Megha Shakya has offered to hold a second *Tibetan Singing Bowl* event for TRAS – Megha is a recognized and sought after Master of this incredible therapy. It's a wonderful and moving experience. More details to come in the fall.

These events will be announced via emails and eblasts – send us your email address so you don't miss out!

You are warmly invited to the 53rd Annual General Meeting of TRAS.

Tuesday, September 15th, 2015, at 7pm

CHOICES ANNEXE
2627 West 16th Ave, Vancouver, BC

The Annexe is immediately to the east of the main Choices store,
accessed through the Flower Shop. Lots of street parking available.

The short business meeting will be followed by a magnificent presentation by Cynthia Bunbury, long time TRAS member who led a group of North Vancouver high students to Nepal on a voyage of discovery this spring – her stunning photography will be a bitter sweet reminder of why so many of us love Nepal.

Handicrafts & Refreshments

And talking of North Vancouver students...

When Cynthia Bunbury's group of high school students heard about the earthquake they promptly donated the remaining funds from their Nepal trip to help out and then planned an impromptu concert and dance – a family kitchen affair, they called it. Three wonderful local bands and a singer offered to participate, and the community responded magnificently, dancing the night away. They raised \$14,000 on the night, and with matching donations have sent \$42,000 to Nepal! **They then managed to find an extra \$1,500 to give to the new TRAS Nepal Rebuilding Fund! Way to go, Sutherland!!**

**Goodbye and
Hello!**

Farewells...

Three TRAS board members stepped down this year – Maureen Minden, Jennifer Bond and Balraj Dhillon. We are sorry to lose their enthusiasm and expertise, but know that life changes and sometimes people have to move on.

...and possible welcomes?

Are you passionate about helping youth in the Trans-Himalayan Region? Do you have time to donate to a meaningful organization? We want to hear from you!

We are looking for new Directors to join the TRAS Board. Work with a seasoned Board to shape the future of TRAS, connect with our partners and raise funds.

To learn more contact: Marina Guy (marina.guy@tras.ca)

Reports from the Field

Not all the news is gloomy. We have recently received excellent reports from the following project partners:

Sambhota Tibetan Schools have sent copies of the finished dvds for teaching Tibetan to the diaspora. Our copies will go to the children of local BC Tibetan families.

Kelsang Wangdu, long-time manager of the handicrafts and sponsorships at the **Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Settlement** in Dehra Dun has been re-elected to this position for a further three years. We are delighted – Kelsang is such a competent and reliable person with whom we have enjoyed an excellent working relationship. As always, Kelsang sends hearty thanks to all TRAS members who support the settlement by buying handicrafts and sponsoring children there. The crèche is also managed by Kelsang, who reports that there are only a handful of toddlers belonging to the weavers now. Other families are taking advantage of the good care offered, and they pay for the privilege. TRAS has just sent the payment for the final year of our support for this crèche, on the understanding that it will become self-supporting from next April.

Munsel-ling School in Spiti, north India, has sent a report that the very deep snow this winter hampered the desk building and the construction of the agricultural compound wall. However, things are starting up again now, and the desks are being built ready for delivery to the school once all the snows have gone. The labourers will soon be heading to Spiti to build the wall.

The greenhouse for the **Phadamchen hostel**, Sikkim, is becoming a reality at last – more on this one later.

Wonderful reports are in from the **Voice of Children Educational Project** in the villages surrounding Almora and Nainital, north India. Extra classes for drop-outs have ceased – because there are no more dropouts!! Imagine the hard work that went into persuading many traditional families to allow their children, particularly the girls, to attend school regularly! The early childhood education centres are also a thing of the past as far as TRAS is concerned – because the women's groups persuaded local governments to take them over! 228 children have been attending bridging classes, after-school tuition classes, children's groups, children's outings, newspaper production, children's fairs, and health workshops.



Women's groups continue to meet, and a delegation went to Dehra Dun to participate in the State Education Consultation held in March. This shows real progress on the part of the women to take an active role in improving things for their children.



New this time:

- ✓ the computer classes which are hugely popular. 58 children are enrolled in the various classes so far. We like their solution to a shortage of good computer teachers in the Nainital area: first they arranged for a young computer-literate woman to do a one-month training program as a teacher (and five other youngsters went along for the training too) then the teacher and equipment move from village to village, setting up for three months in each village, then moving on in rotation. Good for them.



- ✓ the first sign of help for 8 university students from our 'fellowship fund' which up to now has only been used for children's school uniforms and books. That they even HAVE university students is such an encouraging sign and wonderful outcome of the past few years of extra education. TRAS is now ready to offer two scholarships a year from the TRAS Scholarship Fund, each scholarship covering three years. This is a very exciting step forward.
- ✓ the first sign of vocational training: 3 girls have been given a 30 day residential training in hotel management and all of them (who were all Voice of Children volunteers) now have jobs in Dehra Dun and Mussoorie.



They are seen as good role models for the girls in their home villages. 15 women and young girls have been given a one-month tailoring training course.

The Voice of Children libraries continue to be well used. The numbers of enrolled library card holders has increased yet again from 750 to over 1,000! Three libraries are now self-sufficient. TRAS will support the other 17 for a further year by which time we hope the villagers will have figured out how to run their own libraries. A further outcome is the desire of many women to become literate, and classes continue for 19 of them – in many cases one-on-one with a child acting as teacher, under the scheme of 'each one teach one'.

And saving the best until last...

The READI Nepal Humla Delights Café has opened with a bang!

Raj, the chairman of READI, has sent a wonderful report. The young man, Mr. Shiva, who went to Kathmandu for training, learnt well (thanks to the helpful manager of the Himalayan Java Coffee shop) how to make a variety of drinks and to bake many delicious breads and treats. He then bought, with their advice, a coffee machine, a bread making machine, glasses, cups and saucers, 3 tables and 12 chairs, a carpet – and set off back to Simikot. The lovely sign was carved in Kathmandu and represents



the old and the new (English words in traditional Tibetan script) and the local culture of yak travel (the yak is trotting along holding a steaming cup of coffee on its back!). A grand opening was held on April 14, with 200 invited guests (government officials, teachers, tour operators) who were asked for their honest opinion. It was all going so well – then the earthquake struck on April 25 and although it was distant, people were fearful to go inside buildings. So the food and drink went out to the people, with Mr. Shiva supplying coffee and food to office staff. He is also baking breads for the children's tiffin (lunch) and they are loving the taste of their local grains used in new ways. He is getting requests for Tibetan momos and other local favourites – so it seems like a success! Time will tell, but we applaud READI for an innovative way to raise funds for the children's hostel and education.

READI Nepal Humla Delights Café (cont'd)



Can you help TRAS keep these projects going? Here's what is needed for the 2015-16 year:

Voice of Children Education Project #297:	\$26,358
Voice of Children library maintenance #313:	\$5,387
READI Nepal Education Project #300:	\$23,100
READI Nepal Humla Delights Café #320:	\$2,709

UBC Prof. Sara Shneiderman's Talk on political transformation in Nepal

TRAS members and friends packed the lounge at Tsendok Monastery on March 25 to hear a spirited lecture by Prof. Shneiderman, a socio-cultural anthropologist who has worked for almost two decades in the Himalayan regions of Nepal, India, and Tibet. Her research explores the relationships between political discourse, ritual action, and cross-border mobility in producing ethnic identities and shaping social transformation. Currently her research explores an ethnography of "post-conflict" state restructuring in Nepal.

Sara started her talk by giving a snap shot of Nepal with its political history all the way to the present time of state restructuring debate. Her focus was on Nepal's political transformation that started in 1996, through the 10-year Maoist-state civil conflict, through two elections since then, several ethnic and regional identity-based movements, to an ongoing constitution-drafting process. The major political parties have been in intense squabbles to secure their party interests which has led to the difficulties in reaching agreement on how many states should be created and how the geographic boundaries would be carved in the restructured Nepal. The country has been without a constitution for the past 7 years and no local elections have been held for nearly two decades.

The earthquake happening shortly after her talk emphasized the chaos Sara was talking about, though we do hear that the government is trying its best to pull together all the various aid agencies into a cohesive plan of action for rebuilding. Let us hope this may lead to some improvement over time in the governing of this beautiful but benighted country.

The end of a story

After years of TRAS supporting the Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten and evening classes for young people in Lhasa, Tibet, the local government took over all schools about 5 years ago. TRAS had just sent a payment of \$8,000 via the Tibet Development Fund (TDF) for the Kindergarten, when the principal sadly wrote to us to say that the school could no longer operate. There was no way to have the funds returned to Canada, so we worked at finding another way to use the funds to help Tibetan children. A year later, the TDF asked if we could pay for a series of pediatric cataract operations at the Lhasa Institute of Eye Care. This is an excellent hospital, and the need for pediatric surgeries was great, given the literally blinding sunlight in Tibet. We arranged with the Himalayan Cataract Society of the US to have a training team go from the famous Tilganga Eye Institute of Kathmandu to Lhasa to train local doctors. For three years we waited for this to happen, eventually getting word from Dr. Ruit of Tilganga that they were no longer welcome in Lhasa, and all avenues of correspondence were cut. We have since learnt that Chinese doctors did the training and we sincerely hope that the surgeries were carried out. Unfortunately in today's climate there is no safe way to find out. NGO friends visiting Lhasa were told it would be too dangerous to the Tibetans to make inquiries about the funds and the outcome. Nearly all foreign NGOs have left Lhasa now. End of story.



TRAS used to be able to support these children

Sponsorship Report

Have you seen the magnificent Tibetan rugs and chair mats which TRAS has for sale? They are hand woven by the weavers of the Tibetan Women's Centre (TWC) in Rajpur, a small settlement which TRAS helped to establish many years ago. The weavers earn little and money does not go far in India in these days of rampant inflation. Can you help them educate their small children? Because they are living at home, the cost is only \$220 a year for each of these 5 year olds.

There are primary schools nearby, but the older children have to go away to boarding school for high school. Since the Tibetans first arrived in India, many have joined the Indian Army – dangerous work on India's contentious borders at minimal pay.

Tenzin Migmar

Tenzin Migmar is in kindergarten (Stage 2) at the SOS Montessori School in Rajpur. His mother works at TWC as a carpet weaver and his father is in the Indian army. He has one older sister who is studying in boarding school. Their family source of income is only from his mother's carpet wages and his father's salary, with which it is not possible for them to cover all the household expenses and his sister's boarding fees. Therefore he needs your kind support for his education.



Karma Kalsang

Karma Kalsang is also in kindergarten at the SOS Montessori School in Rajpur. His mother died when he was 18 months old. His grandfather is working at TWC in the tailoring section. His father is doing petty business during the winter season. Moreover, his grandmother is suffering from asthma and joint pain. So his family source of income is only from the wages of his father and grandfather, which are not enough to cover all their expenses. Therefore he needs your kind support for his education.



Tenzin Kalsang

Tenzin Kalsang goes to kindergarten at the Tibetan Sambhota School, Puruwala. Her mother is working at TWC as a carpet weaver and her father is in the army. She has two older sisters both of whom are studying in boarding school. Her parents' salaries do not cover all the expenses of her two sisters' school fees. Therefore she needs your kind support for her education.



TRAS

**Supporting health
and education for
children and youth in
the Himalayas**

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