



Trans Himalayan Aid Society

Spring Newsletter ~ March 2007

# SPONSORSHIP WORKS!

**F**rom the moment George and Inge Woodcock first set eyes on the Tibetan refugee children, TRAS has been raising funds to help nurture children in need.

The Woodcocks, on a working trip to India in 1962, were invited to visit a home set up hurriedly to cope with the many lone Tibetan children who had survived the punishing trek over the Himalayas to find refuge in India, following the failed uprising against the Chinese occupation.

Many had become orphaned or separated from their families along the way. The children in this home, in a cold Himalayan winter, were sleeping 5 to a mattress under thin cotton sacks; they wore rags and were barefoot. The Woodcocks immediately contacted friends at UBC to start raising money to help the Tibetans look after the children – and thus TRAS was born.

TRAS has moved from relief to development projects over the years, but the children are never forgotten. There is always a need to help the most needy in an individual way, and TRAS' sponsorship program is an important part of our work. Over the past 45 years, TRAS members have sponsored over one thousand children.

TRAS sponsors children at recognised institutions, with whom we have worked for many years. That first home, the Tibetan Children's Village, along with the Tibetan Homes Foundation, both in north India, have brought up thousands of children, many sponsored by TRAS.



Refugee children arriving in India

The Tibetan Children's Village has satellite schools today, one set up for youth, recently arrived from Tibet, so that they don't have to sit in Grade 1 classes with 6 year olds! TRAS sponsors a number of these young people as they seek an education.

Some of the smaller Tibetan settlements in north India, like Dekyiling and the Tibetan Women's Centre, are partners in the sponsorship program, helping extremely poor families to nurture and educate their children.



George & Inge Woodcock with Dalai Lama

In the remote Spiti Valley in north India, TRAS has partnered with the Munsel-Ling Spiti School to sponsor many of the children

from isolated villages who come

to board at this excellent school, and receive the care and education their families cannot afford to give them.

And in Kathmandu, Nepal, the Buddha Academy looks after 500 of the most destitute children – street kids, orphans, victims of the conflict, children of Tibetan refugees. TRAS members sponsor 125 of these children.

## DOES IT WORK?

We know it does! Dorje Namgyal, the principal of Buddha Academy, who started this school on its journey to help the most needy, was sponsored by TRAS as a young Tibetan refugee in north India.

Many of today's Tibetan teachers, principals, doctors, nurses and community leaders were also sponsored by TRAS. Some have taken on the role of helping their settlements – one teacher, remembering the kindness of her TRAS sponsor, wrote to TRAS for help to put in a much-needed water tank and pipes. She prepared such a good proposal that TRAS was able to undertake the project. The relief for the women of the settlement, accustomed to walking miles for water, was huge. And every child who grew up healthy and with an education is a testament to the value of sponsorship.

In Vancouver alone, several Tibetans say they owe much to their TRAS sponsors in helping them to survive and to succeed in life, including Dr. Tsering Shakya, the Canadian Research Chair in Religion and Contemporary Society in Asia at the Institute for Asian Research at UBC, who recently gave a lecture for TRAS (see Page 4). Tsetan Chonjore, a teacher, lecturer and author, has written about his experience on Page 3, and Kalsang Dawa, the well-known master thangka painter, was sponsored through a TRAS vocational training program to complete his artistic studies (see Page 8 under Coming Events).

**TRAS has many children waiting for a sponsor – Tibetan, Indian and Nepalese. Won't you join this worthwhile, satisfying program?**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPONSORING A CHILD

**What is the cost?** \$400 a year. TRAS is a registered charity, and we will send you a charitable tax receipt. TRAS sends \$360 to the settlement (in two disbursements, February and June); the remaining 10% covers administration costs.

**How do I become a sponsor?** Please e-mail [sponsorship@tras.ca](mailto:sponsorship@tras.ca), or call our office at (604) 224-5133. Our sponsorship director will assign a child to you, and we will send you the one-page case history for your child.

**Can I choose which nationality of child I would prefer, and which sex?** Of course. You will be able to select the settlement, sex and age of the child you would like to help. You may particularly want one who is featured in our newsletter. If that child has already been sponsored, we have many more who need your help.

**Can I write to my child?** If you'd like to send a letter to your sponsored child, we can send it with the next semi-annual disbursement. The settlements send letters from the children at least once each year, which we forward to their sponsors. Often they will include photos, drawings, or report cards.

**Can I send gifts to my child?** A small gift of money is the easiest way to do this. It will be sent, for your child, along with your sponsorship funds. Gift parcels sent from Canada can go astray.

**If I travel to India or Nepal, can I visit my sponsored child?** By all means! It is wonderful when sponsors can make a personal connection with their child. Please let TRAS know if you are planning to do this, so that we can introduce you to the settlement.

**How do I pay?** You can pay the sponsorship fee online: from our website, [www.tras.ca](http://www.tras.ca), click on the Donate Now button. You can pay annually or monthly (\$33/month), whichever is more convenient for you, by credit card. Please indicate the name of your sponsored child. If you prefer, you can send a cheque to our office, paying annually, or quarterly with 4 postdated cheques (\$100/quarter for January, April, July, October).

**Does my sponsorship year start from when I make the first payment?** All sponsorships start from January 1, but if you start sponsoring your child later in the year, you can pay a pro-rated amount the first year, and renew your annual sponsorship on January 1 of the following year. We send a reminder letter towards the end of each year.

**Does my sponsorship money go directly to my child?** Most of the institutions with which TRAS works have many needy children for whom they care. To give the best chance to all the children there, your funds will be added to others to ensure that all the children are nourished, clothed and educated, and none is left out. But you will still be connected with one child who will know you as his very own caring sponsor. In the smaller settlements, where children are living with their families, the child's education is paid for, along with an allowance for food and clothing.

**When does my sponsorship end?** Normally when the child graduates from school.

**What happens if I cannot keep up my sponsorship?** If your circumstances change and you can't continue, please let us know. We'll do our best to find another sponsor for your child.

**Administration:** To keep costs low, volunteer directors do as much as possible of the administration: Marion Tipple is our sponsorship director, handling communication with the settlements and with our sponsors, and Russil Wvong is helping out with the paperwork. Heather O'Hagan, who works in the office two days a week, manages the banking and disbursements.

# WILL YOU SPONSOR A CHILD?

**Yartse Dhondup** is a 9-year old boy. He was born in Sogzong, Kham. His parents were farmers, but his mother had to escape to India after becoming involved in a demonstration 8 years ago. She is now living in Dharamsala and running a tiny shop selling prayer items. Imagine the joy of being reunited with two of her sons (Yartse and his older brother Tsering Dharpo, who is 16) who managed to get to India last September. They are both now studying at the **Tibetan Children's Village, Suja**, for new arrivals from Tibet. Yartse is a healthy, outspoken young boy, doing well in the Junior School.

**Sonam Dolkar.** This 10-year old girl was born in Dakyab, Kham, where her parents eked out a living as farmers. She is an only child. Her parents have now moved to Lhasa, to work as manual labourers on construction sites. Sonam has never attended school, because her parents could not afford the fees. Last May, Sonam, along with a slightly older cousin and 22 other escapees, managed to reach India from Tibet and came to the Tibetan Children's Village, Suja. She is in the Opportunity Class, Primary level, for the time being, but is hard working and active, and particularly loves

**Dabin Tamang** is a 10-year old boy from Rasuwa district, near the Tibetan border. He comes from a remote village where his family lives in a house made of stone and mud. They cultivate potatoes, millet and maize on the mountain slopes. He has three younger siblings. Their local school is so far away, Dabin was deprived of his basic right to an education. His father toils sometimes as a porter, but the pickings are meagre. Therefore, he approached the Buddha Academy in Kathmandu and asked for help. Dabin was accepted into Class

**Lobsang Lama** is a 10-year old boy from the Dolakha District of Nepal. He is the youngest of three. His mother died when he was just 1 year old, and he has been brought up by his maternal uncle and grandfather. They are poor, have no regular work and have their own families to support, so they find it difficult to pay for schooling. Lobsang has seen his father only once last year. His uncle brought him to the **Buddha Academy** and asked for help. Lobsang looks healthy and loves being in school. He is in Special class and is learning the alphabet.

## TSETAN AND HIS SPONSOR



Peggy Larson and Tsetan

**As a refugee child in India in the 1960s and 70s, Tsetan Chonjore was sponsored by TRAS member, Peggy Larson. Today, Tsetan teaches Tibetan language at UBC and at Madison University, Wisconsin. He conducts research and publishes books and papers. He is also an accomplished musician and devotes much of his time here to teaching Tibetan children traditional Tibetan music, dance and song to keep the culture alive.**

### Here is his story:

I was born in Xigatse, Tibet, and left with my aunt and uncle in the early 1960s when I was 12 years old. We travelled on foot and by vehicle into Nepal to a Tibetan refugee camp in Kathmandu where I learned my first 'ABCs' in the refugee school. From Nepal, I moved to Dharamsala and from there to the Tibetan settlement in Mussoorie in the hills in North India. I studied at the Central School for Tibetans and boarded at the Tibetan Homes Foundation run by Mrs. Taring. One day, we children had our individual photos taken. We weren't sure why. We were simply told the photos were 'for sponsorship'. A while later I received a letter from a Mrs. Peggy Larson in Canada. I wrote back to her, and that is how the communication and relationship between my sponsor and I began.

# UPDATES

## SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH OF THE TRAS LECTURE SERIES



**Dr. Tsering Shakya**

On January 24, Dr. Tsering Shakya, the Canadian Research Chair in Religion and Contemporary Society in Asia, at the Institute for Asian Research at UBC, honoured TRAS by giving the first in our series of stimulating lectures.

Dr. Shakya's talk on 'Development and Change in Contemporary Tibet' was a thought-provoking look at social and economic issues in Tibet today, and was much appreciated by his attentive audience. Thank you, Dr. Shakya, for your support!

## EVENING OF MUSIC SUPPORTS TRAS NURSES TRAINING PROGRAM

On February 7, three Vancouver musicians delighted an enraptured audience with an evening of music in support of TRAS.

Alan Matheson jumpstarted the evening with a haunting trumpet solo from behind the curtains. He followed with lively piano and trumpet jazz solo numbers. Jan Rooks, on piano, impressed with powerful renditions of Shostakovich, Chopin and more! Grant Tomlinson provided contrast with delicate French and Italian Renaissance compositions played on a self-crafted lute beautifully adorned with an intricate lute rose carving. As the finale, Jan and Alan regaled the audience with engaging piano/trumpet duets.



**Rose carving by Grant Tomlinson on his self-crafted lute**

All proceeds from the evening will go towards the Nurses Training Program run by the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala, India.

A very big thank you to TRAS member Riina Tamm, who arranged the whole event, and to Jan, Alan and Grant for a wonderful evening and for their support of TRAS!

## A NEW POTTY FOR EACH CHILD

Last September, TRAS received this report from the Little Flowers Creche – the daycare centre for the children of the government workers in His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Government in Exile in Dharamsala. Regular readers may remember that last fall Chung Tsering of the Department of Education wrote in his article how much he and his wife appreciate having their children safely cared for in the Creche so that both parents can work.



**Snuggling under warm blankets on a snowy day**

## The report

"To briefly update you on the creche, we have now 30 children. Most of them are above one year old and below three years old; there are also three children who are just seven to eight months old. Growing number of children and frequent usage of the baby room toiletry, baby walker and baby cycles, meant many of them are now worn out and broken. So, last week we bought a new potty for each child, a few new walkers for those crawling babies, and new cycles for the walking children. We also bought new bed sheets and mattresses for the baby sleeping place. **It was so much of fun to see the children's excitement to have these new things in the creche.**

The monsoon is finally over now in Dharamshala and in the coming month we are planning to whitewash the creche building. And widening the creche space by making some extension to the creche building, so that they have more space for playing. We also requested our staff mess kitchen to improve the babies' midday meals. **All these things happen only with the generous and continued support of your organization. On behalf of the children at Little Flowers Creche and their parents, I would like to thank you and your organization for your support.**

With best wishes and prayers  
Yours sincerely, Dorjee Thinley, Secretary"

# THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS!

These are exciting times at TRAS! Over the past three months and at our recent events, generous TRAS supporters have moved us closer to our target for project funding for the 2006- 2007 fiscal year. The **Spiti Health Care Centre** at Munsel-ling School will now become a reality thanks particularly to the generosity of Joan Cockell and Doug Eaton who, after attending the Spiti slideshow in November, offered to complete the project's funding. And now UBC Medical students have joined TRAS' efforts on the Spiti Health Project as part of a Global Health Initiative for which they have been awarded funding from the UBC Teaching Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF). With the funding, students will contribute through TRAS to the Health Care Centre, a new Toilet block, and training fees for a school healthcare worker. Groups of students will travel to Spiti this summer to begin a baseline health assessment and work with the school to develop health promotion and illness prevention programs. We will keep you updated on this exciting collaboration that helps to support both medical student education in becoming global citizens and community development. For more information please contact Dr. Videsh Kapoor.

Our funding of the **Buddha Academy Vocational Training project** is now almost complete after many TRAS members sent their support over the holiday season and a pledge was made by the Langara Rotaract Club, a service organization of young adults and an official program of Rotary International, to raise \$7000. This nearly completes the funding for the project, which wraps up in 2009.

The Rotaract Club has also donated \$600 for a new program at Buddha Academy which will provide HIV/AIDS education to staff and students. The funds will finance the purchase of books for the older students and the library, and professional workshops for the staff. The Principal, Dorje Namgyal, is so grateful for this help with a difficult but only-too-necessary subject.



**Langara Rotaract members give cheque for HIV/AIDS project**

A very large gift appeared at the TRAS doorstep in December when a donor who wishes to remain anonymous sent \$20,000 for use in a TRAS project which we hope to undertake with CIDA. These funds will help us immensely with the large vocational training project proposal currently in the works.

And another lovely surprise came our way. When TRAS was looking for a new office space in December, the first call to a potential new location was to MPS Executive Suites, and we learned to our delight that we had just been chosen by the MPS staff as the recipient of funds raised from a year-long bottle-drive. The staff has created a "Recycle for Charity Program", which helps the environment and worthy charities at the same time. What luck (or karma?) that we were able to obtain office space with a company that already knew about TRAS and had decided to honour our work with a donation! A big 'thank you' to the staff!



**Chime Wangmo studies nursing**

We are, however, still very much in need of \$5000 for the **C.T.A. Nurses Training Program**, which assists young Tibetan women obtain nursing education in India. Once they have completed the nursing program, many of these young women will fill nursing positions in Tibetan settlements or in remote areas of India where medical services are minimal.

We are also asking for \$2500 for the maintenance of the Tibetan **Dekyiling Creche** in Dehra Dun, India. This daycare program allows parents of 30 toddlers to have fulltime employment in the handicraft centre (from which TRAS purchases the lovely wool and cotton shoulder bags).

**A hearty and sincere 'thank you' to you all for your generous and ongoing support of TRAS!**

# NEPALI FILM FESTIVAL

Sunday April 1, 2007

11:00 am - 6:30 pm

at Langara College, 100 W. 49th Ave, Vancouver

**TRAS, the Nepal Cultural Society of BC (NCSBC) and Langara College Continuing Studies are co-sponsoring Vancouver's Second Nepali Film Festival on Sunday April 1. The one-day festival, featuring films about contemporary Nepal, is a fundraiser for TRAS projects in Nepal. All films have English subtitles. (Not suitable for young children).**

**On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath (2004; 72 mins)** is a multiple award-winning film directed by **Kesang Tseten**. Every 12 years, impassioned devotees pull a 65-foot tall unwieldy chariot, its rider an enigmatic god, on a month-long journey through the Kathmandu Valley. **Machhendranath** is a gripping depiction of an age-old festival.

**We Corner People (2006; 50 mins)**, another award-winning film by **Kesang Tseten**, tells the story of a remote Tamang village that is getting a Swiss-funded trail bridge to make life easier and safer. The film depicts grinding poverty that will astonish and move us, and reveals some of the tensions and complexities that can accompany western development initiatives.

**Subina Shrestha's** compelling documentary, **A Stove, a Blouse and a Gun (2006; 22 mins)**, explores reasons why many women joined the Maoist party. Now that peace agreements are being negotiated, the Maoists' female cadre is actively anticipating the outcome of its sacrifices. It's yet to be seen if women's voices will be heard.

Winner of awards at many film festivals, the captivating **Daughters of Everest (2004; 56 mins)**, directed by **Sapana Sakya** and **Ramyata Limbu**, documents the first-ever expedition of Sherpa women to climb Everest. Told from a woman's perspective rarely seen in Nepal, this film is an inspiring story and an absorbing portrait of the Sherpa community.

**Trailblazing: The Women of Nepal's Trekking Industry (24 mins)**, directed by Vancouver's **Lisa Hoffe**, documents the pioneering spirit and determination of the few women trekking guides working in a conservative male-dominated adventure tourism industry. The story centers around three sisters who operate the only female-owned trekking agency in Nepal.

Tickets available at door and in advance at Café Kathmandu, 2779 Commercial Drive

1 SCREENING \$10 (\$7 students/seniors/low income)

2 SCREENINGS \$15 (\$11 students/seniors/low income)

3 SCREENINGS \$20 (\$15 students/seniors/low income)

Info: [www.tras.ca/filmfest](http://www.tras.ca/filmfest), 604-224-5133 or email: [nepalifilmfest@yahoo.ca](mailto:nepalifilmfest@yahoo.ca)

# SCHEDULE



11 am – 6 pm	<b>Himalayan Market</b> <i>handicrafts, displays, refreshments, open to the public</i>		
<b>Screening 1</b> 12 pm – 1:30 pm	<b>Theatre 1: Religion/Culture</b> ▪ <i>On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath</i>	<b>Theatre 2: Development &amp; Conflict in Rural Nepal</b> ▪ <i>We Corner People</i> ▪ <i>A Stove, a Blouse and a Gun</i>	<b>Theatre 3: Nepali Women Trekking</b> ▪ <i>Daughters of Everest</i> ▪ <i>Trailblazing</i>
1:30 pm – 2:15 pm	<b>Intermission and Himalayan Market</b>		
<b>Screening 2</b> 2:30 pm – 4 pm	<b>Theatre 1: Religion/Culture</b> ▪ <i>On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath</i>	<b>Theatre 2: Development &amp; Conflict in Rural Nepal</b> ▪ <i>We Corner People</i> ▪ <i>A Stove, a Blouse and a Gun</i>	<b>Theatre 3: Nepali Women Trekking</b> ▪ <i>Daughters of Everest</i> ▪ <i>Trailblazing</i>
4:15 pm	<b>Theatre 4: Discussion with <i>Dr. Ramjee Parajulee</i>, Department of Political Science, UBC</b>		
<b>Screening 3</b> 5 pm – 6:30 pm	<b>Theatre 1: Religion/Culture</b> ▪ <i>On the Road with the Red God: Machhendranath</i>	<b>Theatre 2: Development &amp; Conflict in Rural Nepal</b> ▪ <i>We Corner People</i> ▪ <i>A Stove, a Blouse and a Gun</i>	<b>Theatre 3: Nepali Women Trekking</b> ▪ <i>Daughters of Everest</i> ▪ <i>Trailblazing</i>

# TRAS

Supporting health and education for children and youth in the Himalayas

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## COMING EVENTS

The Nepal Cultural Society of BC hosts a catered New Year's Dinner on **Saturday, April 14** in Metrotown. All welcome. Tickets \$20. Phone 604-590-1740 or 604-594-2037 to reserve.



Argyle Secondary Students are hosting their third Himalayan Evening on **Monday April 23<sup>rd</sup>**, 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm at Argyle Secondary School 1131 Frederick Rd., Lynn Valley, North Vancouver. Home cooked Nepalese meal; a documentary film on the challenges of Nepalese women breaking into the trekking guiding business; Nepalese and Tibetan handicrafts. Proceeds to Buddha Academy, Kathmandu. Tickets: \$15 adults, \$10 children. To reserve tickets email [bsheffield@nvsd44.bc.ca](mailto:bsheffield@nvsd44.bc.ca).



Join an Art and Cultural Tour to Tibet with Thangka painter Kalsang Dawa. **June 7 – 21, 2007**. [www.kalsangsawa.com](http://www.kalsangsawa.com)



The **45<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of TRAS** will be held in Vancouver, **June 13, 2007**. Members and friends are warmly invited to attend. Nominations to the Board of Directors are welcomed. Positions to be filled: Events Co-ordinator, Volunteer Co-ordinator, Secretary. Details soon at [www.tras.ca](http://www.tras.ca).



**Coming soon.** Daniel Henshaw's exhibition "Temples and Mountains – photographs from Nepal" at Café Kathmandu. Proceeds help children in Nepal. Phone 604-254-5829 (Daniel or Brenda) for details.



*Tsetan & his sponsor from page 3*

"Mum"

and I have now been communicating for over 40 years. We first met in 1980 when she made a trip to India. Then in 1986, on my first trip to North America to teach Tibetan, I visited Mum and her family in Victoria. In recent years it has been more often since I am teaching at UBC.

In Mussoorie, at times we children were casual about our letter-writing, and one time I asked a friend of mine to write my letter to Mrs. Larson. Soon after, the school received a letter from her. She had immediately recognized that the handwriting was not mine, and was concerned about what had happened to me. Her response surprised me. I had not expected her to pay such attention to me.

**I realized at that moment just how much my sponsor cared for me, my livelihood, my education and my upbringing.**

While at THF, I took every opportunity to learn new things. I played on most sports teams and learned to play all Tibetan instruments. I later taught music to younger children at the school.

After I finished high school, my official sponsorship through TRAS ended. But Mrs. Larson wanted to continue to pay for my education. Due to her support, I was able to continue my studies at St. Joseph's College, Darjeeling. The education I received in Mussoorie and Darjeeling while sponsored by Mrs. Larson is the reason why I have been able to pursue my passion for teaching Tibetan language, culture, music, song and dance.

**I am where I am today because of TRAS and because of Mrs. Larson's kind and continuous support.**

Mrs. Larson currently sponsors two Tibetan children in India.

TRAS's sponsorship program is very important – as much so today as in the early refugee days. As costs of living rise in India, parents find it harder to support their children. Refugee children continue to pour into India from Tibet. The need remains. Sponsors make a difference in children's lives.

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama has always had great foresight and vision in emphasizing the importance of education. But just as one hand cannot clap, his vision alone cannot bring about results. TRAS and its sponsors comprise the other hand. The two hands clap. I am the sound they make. I am the result. I am very, very**