
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Autumn Newsletter

September 2003

TRAS APPLAUDS YOUTH

Maclean's Magazine has just published its annual list of young Canadians to watch - people who may well be future leaders in their respective fields. Well, TRAS also has a list of young people to watch, for the same reason. 9 of them are Canadian and one is Tibetan.

A few years ago, **Katherine Beck** was lucky enough to travel to Tibet with her family when she was 13. Now a student at Simon Fraser University in BC, Katherine decided to use this experience to help the Tibetan cause. She is an enthusiastic member of the executive of STUDENTS WORKING FOR A FREE TIBET and has written an article about Tibet, published as a two-page spread in SFU's newspaper, The Peak. See page 6.

Remember the two **Youth Study Tours to Nepal** which TRAS organised in 1998 and 2000? Several of the 16 participants have helped at TRAS events since then and we wondered, what were they doing with their lives, and had their time in Nepal influenced them in a long term way? To find out, we invited them to speak at the Annual General Meeting last May. Eight of the young people were able to attend, and their remarks were a powerful proof that the study tours have had a huge influence on each of them. It was clear that they not only talk about TRAS and development work at every opportunity, but they are doing what they can to help better the world. See page 3.

The story told by the one **Tibetan** on our list must be typical of the tales of hundreds, who all deserve our admiration for their courage, faith and determination to keep alive their Tibetan heritage. This youngster has recently been sponsored by a TRAS member. We know that thousands of Tibetans have fled to Nepal and India, but rarely do we hear the details of their flight. This young lad's story is so vivid in its simple telling that one cannot help but imagine the emotions that surrounded it. Every parent in Canada would agree with Tenzin's (not his real name) parents that a good education is vital for their child - but would anyone here do as they did and send their child away under the most dangerous of circumstances, risking never seeing him or hearing from him again, in order to give him a better chance in life? What courage and



1998 Nepal Study Tour Participants

selflessness they showed, and how brave Tenzin proved himself to be! The fact that he is studying with joy and determination at his school in India makes us sure he will succeed and go on to help his fellow Tibetans in a meaningful way. His story is on page 5.

So join us in applauding these young people - they are bright signs of hope in a sometimes dark world.

THE DALAI LAMA IS COMING TO CANADA!
He will be in Vancouver and Toronto
April 2004.
Contact TRAS office for details.

Inside This Issue

Report of 41st AGM	2
Did Nepal Make a Difference?	3
He Fled Into Exile	5
Weight of Oppression	6
Sponsorship	7

REPORT OF THE 41ST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF TRAS

The 41st AGM of TRAS was held on May 7, 2003, at the Lutheran Campus Centre in Vancouver. 33 members and guests joined the TRAS Directors to hear how the year had gone and to enjoy a look at Nepal. Special guests were the members of the Nepal Cultural Society.

President Marion Tipple welcomed everyone. Like many other charities, TRAS has been having a harder time financially in the past year. Donations are down, as is investment income, though our commitments to our overseas partners continue. Also, the CIDA focus is moving away from funding ngos to bilateral funding. The minimum size of project which CIDA will now consider for funding has been increased from \$50,000 to \$75,000. Although TRAS regularly undertakes two or three large projects, the new restriction eliminates the possibility of applying for CIDA funding for our many smaller projects. TRAS will continue to undertake smaller projects which show the potential for longterm benefits, but the number we can undertake will be considerably fewer. The President asked anyone with ideas for fundraising to speak to a Director. (*Ed's note: this applies to all who read this newsletter - if you have any suggestions for fundraising, do let the TRAS office know!*)

Bill Haberl, outgoing Treasurer, presented the *audited financial statements*. These are available from the TRAS office if you would like details. The overall health of the Society is good, although not as strong as it has been. Assets are down by \$100,000 over the previous year. This is partly because of increased flow to projects, but also because of a smaller portfolio and lower interest rates. Bill stressed the importance of fundraising so that we can continue to help where help is needed.

The *Sponsorship Report* given by **Dr. Joan Ford, the Sponsorship Secretary**, was considerably rosier - 304 children are being sponsored in twelve settlements - ten in India and two in Nepal. This is an increase of 16 children over last year, and of our new sponsors, 7 came to us via our website! Joan gave credit to our loyal sponsors for their continued support and thanked them all. The Mustang Girls' scholarship program was completed this year. 49 girls in all were sponsored to the level of the School Leaving Certificate (grade 10 equivalent) in the remote Mustang area, where girls traditionally did not have the opportunity or encouragement to finish school. What a success story for those girls, and what an example this will be for the next generation! The Buddha Memorial Children's Home in Kathmandu continues to expand, with children brought by parents or relatives from the dangerous rural



Mother & Child group, CHIRAG

areas of Nepal, where their lives have been disrupted by the fighting. TRAS members currently sponsor 127 children at the Home.

Abby Fitch reported from the *Nominations Committee* that, happily, Inge Woodcock and Dorothea Leach will continue as Patrons. Retiring Director Graham Peat was thanked for his five years of service, which included building the TRAS website. The following slate of Directors was presented for re-election: Frank Beck, Lynn Beck, Bert Clark, Hana Clark, Abby Fitch, Joan Ford, Bill Haberl, Daphne Hales, Jennifer Hales, Georgina Henderson, Videsh Kapoor, Maureen Minden, Brian Sheffield, Marion Tipple, Peter Roberts. Gabriela Sava was nominated for election. This slate was approved. (*Please see back page for Officers of TRAS*)

Lynn Beck, Projects Director, gave an overview and slide show of *current projects*, concentrating on those in Nepal. The history of ACAP, Nepal, from 1992 to the present was shown, along with the successful vocational trainings TRAS is funding at the Buddha Memorial School, Kathmandu. Lynn also mentioned projects in India - CHIRAG Mother and Child Care, run jointly with CIVA; SHARE Sanitation and Health project, which has built over 500 latrines and taken health care and immunization to hundreds of villagers; SPITI SCHOOL, where house-mothers trained by TRAS look after the boarders and a computer training project is in progress; - and the Lhasa Kindergarten in Tibet.

Two members of the *Nepal Cultural Society* then entertained us with lively music and dance. This was followed by the presentations by the young participants from the two *Nepal Study Tours*.

DID NEPAL MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Did going to Nepal as a member of a TRAS group to study the effects of overseas development by a Canadian NGO make a difference to the participants? Did it actually change or influence their lives? Well, yes, actually - it really did! The eight young people who attended the TRAS AGM made a powerful impression on those present - here are some of their comments:

Zoe: Everything I do and everything I see has been affected by the trip. For me, our trip got me exploring different cultures. The constant questioning which went on on our trip has also been dominant in my life since - in my classes at university, in travelling, discussing events happening in the world today - **I question now the 'west is best' ideology and I look at similarities rather than differences between cultures**, especially when at first glance it may seem as if there are more differences than similarities. Our trip gave me my first glimpse of life outside North America, and encouraged me to question (what I had taken for granted before).

Catriona: You don't realise it at the time, **but a trip like this takes you from the course you were on and it shifts you** - only a couple of years later you look back and see how it's altered your path. So many youth groups go abroad and do work which is perhaps more beneficial for the youth than for the people in the country, but we didn't do that, and I'm so grateful for the perspective we were given. **It changed my perspective on the values of our culture** and the life that I was 'supposed' to live - I was supposed to go to university, to get some kind of a career, to get a house, but I wasn't really sure why. It was my first chance to realise that the rest of world doesn't live like this - I'm not going crazy to have this kind of hunch that maybe this isn't right. Having support of my peers, who were also questioning attitudes, was great. I know a lot of people are inspired to work abroad, but **it gave me the inspiration to do more work at home.**

Kerrie: My life was already heading towards a global issues, international development agenda, and I was already in what you could call 'counter culture', in terms of consumerism, so it didn't so much shift my life path as support it. I never knew you could 'do' development as a career, or human rights work. In Grade Eleven I wanted to be a jazz musician, but in Nepal I was thinking "Hmm, what do I want to do? I want to do *this*!" **So right now I am at UBC taking international relations**, focussing on development and human rights. One thing I learnt was about CIDA's funding issues - the whole issue of sending Canadians to go to do things in countries



where local people could do it just as well themselves. It's something I think about a lot, that the Canadian government spends a lot of money sending people like me to third world countries to learn, but I think there's a lot of value in the learning. I certainly learned a lot, and **the most significant thing was that it helped me get rid of the kind of attitude that asks "How do WE administer THEM, how do WE develop THEM?"** I'll talk to people at UBC doing the same program as me, and I'll hear that kind of language. So I say "Well, you know, I talked to a women's group in Nepal that made huge differences, maybe did better than some economics student from UBC would do". It's given me a head start, and the whole thing about sustainability, alternatives, community development, comes up again and again- if I write a paper, if I join a discussion it always seems to come up. It seems to be such a core.

Tamlin: It was a huge eyeopener. I realise that I tend to look at the broader aspects of things now, which I think is really important. Going into Grade Twelve I wasn't really certain what I wanted to do, but **the conservation areas that we visited really inspired me** and got my head thinking about the real conservation problems which are out there. It really made me want to go back and work with the people - **I found it really important to do work with the people and not just for them. So I'm taking environmental science at the University of Calgary** and I've kind of been pushed along the whole way by our experience - that's what leading me, what's driving me, and I hope eventually to go overseas to work in conservation programs and I hope to inspire other people as well to do this kind of work.

Sara: Me too! Hearing the stories of the devastation and then seeing real community action that was physically changing

the land was amazing. Even from being interested in community projects here, I hadn't seen at such an engaged level community work that was initiated by the people who had the need, supported by people with the privilege to support them, and that was part of the learning for me. It's not about going in and building a water purification system and then walking away from it- it's about getting genuine solidarity. **Coming back, it helped me work in my own community.** Some of the projects that ACAP is doing with support from TRAS and others, like the women's organizations which are doing administration, plus cultural things plus other kinds of sustainability work helped form my ideas. **I've been working with lots of women's organizations here and in the south of this continent, on environmental stuff, and I've been learning a lot about what global trade means and how we can learn to be responsible, how to trade in a healthy way.** I just came back from South America where I was working with indigenous people and campesinos who were mobilising around education about what fair trade means, and agricultural and cultural sustainability. Nepal kickstarted this huge learning curve for me.

Micaela: Going to Nepal in Grade Eleven, I didn't know where I was going in my life, **but I am now studying urban geography at UBC, and human development.** Looking back, the experiences in Nepal, seeing each different village and city and how they had developed, are very important to what I am studying right now. It is so fascinating - why has Kathmandu become such a central place in Nepal and why did it develop the way it did, and will Pokhara develop in future years the way Kathmandu has? For one of my urban geography classes I did a project on TRAS and its work. It was great being put into the situation where you can see how the local groups organize themselves and how they themselves build their kitchen gardens and the walkways and organize the daycares. I am in a Women's Studies class at UBC and **to have the actual evidence of empowering women and how they can organize themselves in a local group** - I think I still don't realise all the ways it affected me - it is forever coming up in conversations and as examples, and always will!

Daniela: **I have just finished my nursing degree at the University of Calgary.** The whole experience of the Nepal trip - it has influenced my life since the day we knew that we were going. I have just come back from three months in Kenya where I did my last nursing practicum. I was working in a small rural hospital. Living in a small community brought it all back to me, reminded me about how much development

aid goes on and how much of a reality it is in these communities. **What I noticed most, though, was the difference in the kind of development I saw going on in Kenya and what I saw in Nepal. In Nepal I felt there was a community focus,** it was community driven, inspired by the community and you didn't see any foreigners doing the work, whereas in Kenya it was the exact opposite, foreigners who came in and took over the community and it was difficult to watch because the people in the community were thankful, very appreciative of what was being done for them, but they weren't so much involved in it. The whole role of development was not necessarily going the way the community needed it - it was more the way the westerners thought it should go. It made me realise how important it is to get the community involved, and have them come up with the ideas and do the work. There were several projects that I saw that were started, and they were brought to a maintenance level, but the community just didn't maintain them. They didn't really understand what was going on and they were never really fully integrated into the projects. It was frustrating to watch. Travel nursing was one of my goals when I started but now that I have seen that kind of development, I don't just want to go into a community and do the work for someone. Being in Nepal and Kenya showed me the difference. **I still want to nurse abroad, but I will be more aware of what kind of situation I put myself in and how I work.**

Jennifer: **I am studying marine biology at UBC. There were 2 big messages that I got from the trip to Nepal; one was that I can make a difference if I choose to, even from overseas, from wherever I am, and the other was that the best way to help people is to enable them to help themselves.** Two years ago I took a year out and went to Central America, but I couldn't be a tourist. I listened, I learned, I had an amazing experience. Because of TRAS I found that I was more of a traveller than a tourist, and that has stayed with me for all my travels - I can't really have a vacation any more because I have to get away from the tourist areas, go off and see the poorer neighbourhoods, and what each place is really like. When I came back **I went into agricultural sciences and realised I could use my knowledge of biology to have a more direct influence in benefitting the world.** So right now I am looking at plant-based pesticides and insecticides; for instance there are plants in Indonesia which can be extracted by the people as organic pesticides and insecticides. For me that's really great - a way to be involved in the development of developing nations and still stick to my science. TRAS had a big influence in steering me in that direction.

HE FLED INTO EXILE

“He fled into exile and joined our village”. Such a simple sentence, but it intrigued Tenzin’s new sponsor. What kind of journey, emotional and physical, lay behind that bald statement? A couple of letters later, we have a more complete story, which must be typical of those of so many Tibetan refugees. This is the information told by Tenzin to the sponsorship secretary at the Tibetan school in India which has given him refuge.

“Tenzin was born in eastern Tibet and is the youngest of four children. His mother looks after the household and children and his father earns a living for his family by selling small household goods. As the chances of schooling for Tibetan children under the yoke of the Chinese is very slim, Tenzin and his brothers have been taking care of cattle. However, his father heard about the Tibetan school opportunity in exile, and with constant urgings of his parents, Tenzin fled into exile. He and his father started their journey to Lhasa where Tenzin was introduced to a guide. There were two other children younger than himself (he was 14) and one adult, who was half blind. His father gave some money which he had saved up to the guide (Tenzin is not sure how much). So in total they were five people who travelled together from Lhasa to the border with Nepal. The guide had hidden them in big wooden boxes along the way, to save them from Chinese vigilance, as he is a businessman and he brought the boxes to sell in Kathmandu. They survived on tsampa (a staple Tibetan food), yak butter and water. From just before the border, they journeyed by foot on a very steep path and crossed rivers and that took them two and a half days. While crossing rivers they were nearly drowned but luckily some Nepalese who must be policemen, Tenzin thinks, helped them out. On the other hand, they were checked thoroughly by these men. Unfortunately, the sum of Rs.2000, which his father had given him, saying that it would be of use once he reached India, was taken away by those policemen. They didn’t even spare their clothes. Finally, with no money or belongings, they reached the Tibetan Reception Centre in Kathmandu. From there they got separated, as the half blind man left to become a monk and Tenzin, along

with the two children, was sent to Dharamsala Tibetan Reception Centre, from where he was admitted to our school and the other two children to a different Tibetan school.”

Even now, such a lot is missing from this story - the emotional parting from his family, the terror of being cooped up in a box on the bumpy, scary ride to the border, the strain of the hard trek through the mountains, of being nearly drowned, and rescued only to be robbed by the rescuers - now he has lost everything from home - his clothes and his father’s carefully saved money. Did the guide leave them to cross the mountainous border on their own? He must have driven the truck through the border and somehow met them on the other side - or did they walk to Kathmandu on their own? The others were sent to different destinations. Now he was truly on his own, and it must have been frightening. We wonder if he has been able to let his parents know that he arrived safely and is doing well at school; his sponsor has written to find out.

But finally comes the good news, in a letter written by Tenzin himself in passably good English. “Here in school I am very happy and enjoy my staff members and schoolmates, also my friends. My hobby is to dance (Ed: presumably Tibetan dancing). I am a dancer of the school team and I am feeling very glad to dance. My best subject is Tibetan and English language and I am studying very hard and never waste my leisure time of school. I obey the school rule and respect all the teachers and staff members of my school and elder students”. So all is well so far. Tenzin has landed up in one of the Tibetan boarding schools with kindly houseparents and dedicated teachers, who will give him an education which combines traditional Tibetan subjects with necessary western learning. He will have the chance to continue with academic subjects or take vocational training. Will he work for the Tibetan cause in India or be able to return home to a freer Tibet? Only the future holds the answer.



There are many more ‘Tenzins’ needing our support in India, and many Nepalese children equally in need, not to mention the poor Indian children who are given a chance by Sister Victorine to learn a useful trade. If you haven’t thought about sponsoring a child before, would you consider helping one of these children now?

THE WEIGHT OF OPPRESSION by Katherine Beck *(excerpts from her article)*

As I look behind, the trail of dust awakened by our jeep drifts into the sky. We are making our way to Lhasa, the capital city of Tibet. Having just come from Kathmandu, Nepal, a place of vibrancy, chaos and vivacity, the weight of political oppression in Tibet is palpable. I felt it the moment I stepped off the plane. Around us, armed guards blocked any chance of escape into the hills. The airport lies isolated in the valley, a two hour drive from any settlement. I wondered what they could be holding us in from.

As we drive, our guide explains that the 1949 Chinese invasion of Tibet was not the first. They supported the Mongols, who invaded briefly in 1720. As well, in 1903 British troops from India marched into Tibet, and a trade pact alone stopped an economically-minded British invasion. The thirteenth Dalai Lama hoped to clarify disputes over Tibet's border with China. Slowly, Tibet was embarking on a journey out of seclusion and into the world of modern politics. The fourteenth and current Dalai Lama worked tirelessly to educate himself about both internal and international politics, particularly Tibet's relationship with China and Britain. However, upon the Chinese invasion in 1949, Tibetans had little hope of a successful resistance. New advances in military technology ensured that 10,000 poorly trained Tibetans with old, rusty rifles had little chance of defending themselves against the one hundred thousand invading Chinese troops. To the world inhaling the first breaths of renewal after the Second World War, this distant plateau in one of the far corners of the earth was of little concern. The Tibetan government's attempt to solicit aid from Britain, America and India met with fatigue and ultimately, inactivity. Driving down the valley, surrounded by the barren hills that make up a large part of Tibet's landscape, I try to imagine the battle that took place in these hills half a century ago. I picture the scarlet robes of Tibetan monks blowing in the cold wind, as they take cover in caves, behind rocks and in the towers of monasteries hundreds of years old.

The violence escalated in 1959, and fearing for his life and the future of his people, the young Dalai Lama set out over the Himalayan mountains towards India. The journey to freedom has since been undertaken by thousands upon thousands of Tibetans. Many do not survive the elements, others are detected by the Chinese army and punished for their attempted escape. Chinese government policy towards

Tibetans has remained incredibly repressive. Accounts of torture and murder are rampant; the Tibetan flag and photos of the Dalai Lama are prohibited. More Chinese now live in Tibet than Tibetans.

Somehow, though, the Tibetan people manage to persevere. To keep hope alive. And, perhaps most importantly, to assert their political convictions by peaceful means. They have managed to maintain the essence of their Buddhist identity through peace. To some, Tibet is an inconsequential land far away, whose people have little context in a modern world. In a time of many wars, some might wonder about the relevance of the Tibetan cause. Yet the state of the world today should make clear the value of a culture that can face violent oppression with reason and moderation.



Katherine Beck (background) helps sell Tibetan crafts for TRAS

BOOK THIS DATE NOW! And you'll be in for a treat! The Planetarium will be the venue for a stunning photo essay of Dr. Marion Tipple's upcoming photographic expedition in Tibet.

**'Across Tibet to Shishapangma'
by Dr. Marion Tipple
at the Vancouver Planetarium,
Saturday, November 1, 2003
at 7:30pm**

Suggested donation at the door
\$10 towards TRAS projects

SPONSORSHIP REPORT by Joan Ford, Sponsorship Secretary

We have probably all heard ad nauseam the refrain that it only costs the equivalent of a cup of coffee a day to sponsor a child in the developing world. We've heard it so often, we may not listen any more. But those of us with children or grandchildren can relate to other pertinent expenses. How much does it cost for the 'extras' - to have a child in hockey, or soccer, or ballet? How about music lessons and swimming? Does \$360 go very far? Not these days! But in India and Nepal that small amount is nearly enough to keep a child alive, fed, sheltered and educated for a year. What value for money!

Joan Ford writes: Earlier this year I wrote to Dorje Namgyal Lama (Principal of Buddha Children's Home in Kathmandu) to ask if the sponsorship money was still

adequate to cover the cost of a child's needs. He replied that it did not cover the cost, but he was very grateful for the help given. TRAS then contacted the other settlements and all replied in a similar manner. At a TRAS Board meeting in July it was decided to ask sponsors to increase their annual donation from January 1, 2004. Full sponsorship will now be \$360 per annum, and school fees only will be \$180 per annum. Added to this amount is the TRAS membership of \$20 p.a. to cover the costs of bank drafts to the settlements, correspondence, office time and the newsletter. This is the first increase since the early 1990s. I hope this will be satisfactory to sponsors. Your help is very much appreciated by the various settlements.

Here are two case histories needing sponsors:

CHAYA MAHATARA This little girl was born in 1994 in Dolpa, a remote Nepalese village. Her father used to love her very much, but two years ago he was shot dead by the Maoist rebels in their district headquarter. She lives now with her grandparents and mother in the village. The main occupation of this family is farming. They have a small plot of land where they grow a little bit of maize and potato when they have a good rainfall. This summer she was brought down by one of the village headmen who approached the school and requested help. She looks very cute and happy to be here in the school. Now we are looking for a sponsor.

URMILA NEPALI Urmila comes from a very poor family. They live in a remote village in Mustang. They belong to a low caste and are looked down on in their society. She has a younger sister at home. Her parents cannot afford to send little Urmila to school. Therefore her admission here was recommended by Mr. Krishna Thakali, one of our board members. She goes to kindergarten and looks healthy. We are now looking for a sponsor.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

TRAS EXECUTIVE

Patrons Mrs. Inge Woodcock
 Mrs. Dorothea Leach
 President Dr. Marion Tipple
 Vice-President Abby Fitch
 Secretary
 Treasurer Ms. Gabriela Sava
 Sponsorship Dr. Joan Ford
 Project Director Dr. Lynn Beck

Trans - Himalayan Newsletter

Editor Daphne Hales

TRAS Office

5885 University Blvd.
 Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1K7
 Office Secretary - Bridget Bird
 Tel: 604-224-5133
 Fax: 604-676-2554
 e-mail: tras@portal.ca
 TRAS website: www.tras.ca



Om Mani Padme Hum

Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus

DIRECTORS

Dr. Frank Beck

Bert & Hana Clark

Bill Haberl

Daphne Hales

Jennifer Hales

Georgina Henderson

Dr. Videsh Kapoor

Maureen Minden

Peter Roberts

Brian Sheffield

Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20) \$20

Possible Additional Donations:

Annual Donation of **\$360** for the "Child Development and Education Project"

at a residential school or in a settlement _____

Donation to the Old People's Fund, which supports a "Self-Help Project"

for the elderly and infirm. _____

Donation to the general fund or other specific area of your choice. _____

TOTAL\$ _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

Please write address and postal code on your cheque and mail to:

TRAS Office - 5885 University Blvd.

Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1K7