
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Winter Newsletter

December 2003

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This fall, I returned to Tibet and undertook a journey which took me from Lhasa, across Tibet, to Kathmandu in Nepal. Most people perceive this as an exotic trip; those who have been, know the harshness of this journey. With modern conveniences, my journey was made relatively comfortable, but Tibetans do not have the luxury of a land cruiser or a bed at night. Bundled against the wind and blowing sand, they walk or travel in the back of open trucks, sleeping under the stars, to seek employment opportunities or education for their children. Unfortunately, many arrive in modern Lhasa or Shigatse with few skills and little money and find themselves competing for work with better educated and skilled Han Chinese. Desperate, the young women find employment as bar girls and prostitutes, while the depressed, disadvantaged, young men hang around smoking and drinking. The lucky few find occasional construction jobs, others are reduced to begging.

Education is imperative to change this cycle. Tsarong Phungyal, a Tibetan teacher, returned from exile in India to start the Lhasa Yutok Kindergarten, for the poor children of the Barkhor who would otherwise not attend school. At night, in the same classrooms, adults can learn English and Chinese, essential to obtaining any worthwhile employment in Tibet. Thousands of miles away in Kathmandu at the Buddha Memorial Academy, another exiled Tibetan, Dorje Namgyal, provides a home and schooling for more disadvantaged children: the poor, the orphaned and some who have made a hazardous crossing of the Himalaya, sent by their parents to give them a better life. Visiting these schools, I was proud to be associated with TRAS which supports both these projects by sponsoring children, training teachers and providing vocational training, so that this generation can compete on equal terms with those more fortunate. **Seeing the children's enthusiasm for knowledge, their shining eyes and bright smiles, their gratitude for so little, I was humbled and grateful, that with the financial support of our members and sponsors, we can make so much difference.**

I wish I could tell you that the situation is improving for those we cannot reach, sadly it is not. In Tibet, the Qinghai - Lhasa railway, scheduled to be completed in 2007 is progressing rapidly. Its completion will allow an unrestricted influx of Han Chinese and cheap material goods, impossible for uneducated and unskilled Tibetans to compete against. In Nepal, the Maoists continue to terrorize the country and battle with the army, neither side strong enough to win. Orphaned children pour into Kathmandu, many desperately seeking refuge at the Buddha Memorial Home.

This festive season, I implore you to give generously and help in any way you can: sponsor a child, support a project, send a donation in honour of a loved one, make a bequest. In Asia, a little goes a long way, we can and are making a difference and with your ongoing help we can continue to do so.

Thank you for your support,

From Tibet, *Tashi Delek*

From Nepal, *Namaste*

And on behalf of the board of directors of the Trans-Himalayan Aid Society, I wish you a joyous holiday season.

Marion Tipple, President

Winston Churchill once said "We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give" Throughout this newsletter you will see the faces of the people we are trying to help, with your support.

Inside This Issue

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Updates on the Year's Stories | 2 |
| ACAP's Progress Report | 4 |
| Shopping Corner | 5 |
| Barry Leach Report | 6 |
| Sponsorship | 7 |

UPDATES ON THE YEAR'S STORIES:

Some of the students from the Nepal Study Tours who were not able to attend the AGM last May have been in touch to let us know how the experience affected their lives.

Joanne wrote:

"I'm currently employed as a Research Assistant at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington, DC. We work on development issues as they pertain to food and agriculture. I sit in the Environment and Production Technology division, where I get to research environmental policy questions (biotechnology, nutrient runoff, soil degradation, water scarcity). My big project at the moment is the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (www.millenniumassessment.org). My boss Stanley Wood is a coordinating lead author for two chapters of the Assessment, so I am helping him (read: doing all the work) to pull those chapters together.

The projects we visited in Nepal - integrated pest management at AAA, organic fertilizers, kitchen gardens, hillside reforestation at the ACAP villages... are totally relevant to my present line of work. I'm the IFPRI liaison for "ecoagriculture partners," an international network of scientists and policy makers who are trying to find ways to have their conservation cake and eat it too -- i.e., preserving natural biodiversity, *using less inputs*, and at the same time *increasing* crop yields. It's helpful to have had a first hand look at some of those experiments, as we did in Nepal."

Kiyomi wrote that she hopes her studies will lead her into the medical field, and she will always be interested in development aid. "My experience on the TRAS Nepal trip has influenced me in more ways than I am probably capable of realizing. I was able to learn more in that one month in Nepal than any textbook could teach me in one year".

Balraj wrote from the University of Manitoba that he has all the pictures from the Nepal trip up on his wall and that "I don't think a day goes by that I don't think of something about that trip. I'm really upset I wasn't able to come and speak at the AGM, so writing this is the best way I could even come close to explaining how thankful and lucky I was to have had that amazing experience. I learned more about the world and civilization in three weeks in Nepal than I ever could have in years of studying Socials. It changed the way I conduct my life. I'm striving to do as much as I can to help people and make a difference in others' lives. I'm hoping to work with a children's camp this summer."

Melanie was in touch a few months ago: "I'll be going back to UBC in the fall (International Relations and Latin American Studies) and then I take off on my exchange to Chile. I'm going to Peru and Bolivia first and then it's off to Santiago to start my classes. **The trip to Nepal really set me off in the right direction** and over the years I've appreciated and realized the importance of that experience more and more. It really helped me confirm what I wanted to study and **more importantly question the role that I wanted to play in this crazy world we live in.**"

Camille has received her BA in International Relations from UBC, and is now doing a Master's degree in Globalization and Development at the University of Warwick in the UK.

Another connection: we have just learned that *Kerrie* (who told her story at the AGM) sits on a committee with past President John Conway, and from what he has seen, he feels the TRAS funds were well spent in training members of this generation of compassionate Canadians.

He fled into exile – we told Tenzin's story in the September 2003 Newsletter, but we wondered how the little group of refugees had reached Kathmandu safely after being robbed in the mountains, and whether Tenzin had been able to tell his parents of his final safe arrival. It turns out that the businessman who had driven them (hidden in boxes) as far as the mountainous border had arranged with a Nepalese friend to meet them on the Nepal side, and he took them safely to Kathmandu. Tenzin did write to his parents, and eventually he received one letter from them – so they know he is safe and doing well!

Didi-la's old people – in the March 2003 Newsletter we reported that the elderly, destitute Tibetans living in squalor in Didi-la's home town of Zadoh had been warmed last winter by the mattresses and blankets bought with the help of TRAS members. Didi-la went back to Zadoh in the summer with the funds given her by the Chinese lady, and boy, did things change around there! First she got the old people to agree to let her remove the piles of garbage (which they had collected as their only fuel source) and in return she would provide a regular delivery of yak dung! The old people were delighted – this was their traditional fuel which they never thought to see again, AND the order has given a source of income to nearby yak herders. Then she ordered traditional Tibetan beds (like a day bed) from a local carpenter, and



the rest of the needed mattresses and quilts from the nearest city in China. Delivery day was like Christmas, and neighbours all pitched in to help. Didi's family and the Tibetan woman who had promised some help last year have been true to their word, and regular basic food is delivered by a number of good hearted locals. Several of the old people have been 'adopted' by neighbours, who give them leftovers each day. And better yet, one or two of these ladies have been to visit the old people. So their status has improved, along with the conditions. Didi spent some of the TRAS money on cast iron stoves with metal chimneys, to improve the cooking and heating. The local official who should have been helping these old people turned up, with lots of excuses for his lack of help – but one sentence from the diminutive Didi got him moving! She was invited to his home – a beautiful house in a walled compound. The Canadian woman with Didi was ready to leave when she saw the marked contrast in living conditions – but Didi said, no, this is reality and we have to work around it. And once again she has!



Didi-la's next project is to raise funds to build an old people's home beside a nunnery run by her cousin, who has promised that nuns-in-training will help to look after the old people. And then comes a project to start a little school for the children of the nomad herders. There is a school in Zadoh which they could attend, but the families cannot afford to have someone live in town with the children, so Didi plans to take the schooling to them, building a small school in one of the valleys the nomads live in.



top photo: Garbage for fuel - very toxic!

middle photo: Delivery day!

bottom photo: New bed, warm blanket, new stove!

ACAP'S PROGRESS REPORT

The Annapurna Conservation Area in Project in Nepal carries out conservation and development activities in a beautiful, mountainous region with 7 villages, a population of around 25,000 and many tourist trekkers. The turnaround which has occurred over 10 years from land degradation, deforestation and poverty to flourishing forests, well kept vegetable gardens, healthy animals, well nourished children, active women's groups, income generating schemes, clean villages and well organized tourist facilities is amazing. TRAS, with the support of CIDA, is proud to be involved in this project. The current political situation in Nepal has limited ACAP's work, and several field offices are now closed, but the impressive fact is that the work continues, proving that ACAP has done a splendid job of training local teams. Their administrative and management skills are seeing them through this difficult time.



A few highlights from the report for 2003:

- **Forestry:** Tree plantations are maintained for fodder, fuel wood and timber. Guards are trained to patrol, to ward off illegal cutting and poaching. Training is given in scientific harvesting and sustainable utilization of forest products. Nurseries for healthy, good quality tree seedlings (50,000 seedlings). Stone retaining walls built.
- **Alternative Energy:** This is a core program, to reduce the stress on the forests. Great success with biogas plants (9 installed in 2003) and demand is increasing. Three tons of firewood (11.6 trees) are saved each year by one biogas plant. Microhydro is being tested. Better cook stoves (28 built in 2003) reduce use of firewood by 27% annually. Study tour of successful sites was conducted.
- **Conservation Education:** 15 teachers were trained to give conservation education to 1300 students in classes 6, 7 and 8. Prizes given for the best CE students, to encourage and motivate students for better learning. 103 students were honoured this year. Unfortunately, a conservation awareness camp had to be cancelled, because of the risky political situation. Study tour to familiarize students with conservation issues such as forest fire, erosion, waste management was conducted for 401 students and their teachers.
- **Gender development:** Women perform the majority of the work, but are still little respected and have no role in decision making. ACAP's programs are turning this around. Women's groups are becoming a powerful and beneficial force in village life. Two facilitators were





trained to teach adult literacy classes and 5 facilitators were given advanced training. 261 women attended advanced classes. 64 children attended day care centres, to prepare them for schooling and to free up their mothers.

- **Income generation activities:** Trainings were given in saving and credit activities, micro enterprises, poultry farming, goat farming, basic accounting and auditing. Women's group conservation management training was given to 120 women.
- **Health programs:** 25 poor women were given training in nutrition, vaccination, mother and child health and sanitation. Family planning sessions were run for 207 men and women. 2 health posts were equipped. 18 students were taught about sexual diseases, pollution, social environment. 1 new day care centre is being built.
- **Agriculture:** 415 farmers are in a trial to become self dependent in cereal crops. Vegetable seeds distributed to 1500 households. Vegetable seedlings distributed to 1200 households. Fruit tree seedlings distributed to 7 villages. Cash crop farming promoted to 64 farmers.
- **Irrigation:** Irrigation canals mended or replaced. Clean drinking water provided to 500 people. Three other irrigation canals laid to provide water for kitchen gardens for 180 people.
- **Bee keeping:** New technology and method for building hives was introduced for 20 farmers.
- **Livestock:** Breeding goat and buffalos bought to improve local breeds, for production of milk and meat. Animal nutrition through distribution of mineral blocks and grass

seed to 175 farmers. Two drinking troughs were built. Veterinary services and vaccinations were offered to the 7 villages.

SHOPPING CORNER

We had two 'best sellers' at the successful November slide show given by Marion Tipple on her latest trek in Tibet – cards and Tibetan woolen shoulder purses. One card collection is of handpainted, colourful Tibetan scenes on handmade paper, and the other is a series of Marion's wonderful 'Children of the Himalaya' photographs. The handmade cards are \$.75 each or 4 for \$2.50. The 'Children' series are \$4.00 each.

The stylish shoulder purses are made from traditional Tibetan woven wool fabric, in several colours, with traditional designs on them. The shape of the purse is modern and useful. It measures about 9.5 inches long, by 6.5 inches wide, with a series of zippered pockets and a shoulder strap. Only \$15 each!



hand painted card collection



Marion's "Children of the Himalaya" photo series (cards)



BARRY LEACH ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT REPORT

We have received the first interim report from SHARE, the organization with whom TRAS is working on this project, and it can be described as *cautiously optimistic!* This project aims to educate the Manali area people to help their environment through composting, proper garbage disposal, and a reduction in the use of plastics. SHARE is tackling this huge education project through three avenues: schools, institutions and like-minded groups. There is little or no municipal action, so they are starting from scratch.

Ren Madan of SHARE writes: “We have formed 2 Eco Clubs in schools. One has started composting with the help of vermiculture. They have had mixed results so far. Education and training are a must and will require time. This school plans to make cloth bags to go along with the jute shopping bags. These cloth bags are needed for shoppers who find it difficult to manage with newspaper bags since these tear easily. The second Eco Club has had better success with composting and is keen to extend their efforts.

We have started composting in 2 institutions, the Mountaineering Institute and the Border Road Organization. They are both working at it, but have just done it for the form’s sake without understanding the purpose. The staff has no training or comprehension of the task, so we are trying to get some responsible person to own and oversee the project.

Garbage separation and composting at the home level is an entirely new concept, difficult to introduce. However, as with the toilets, so with the garbage – once a critical mass of family involvement is achieved, things will move.

SHARE has been successful in talking to various groups. One group, SEVA, has agreed to try to manage solid waste management in one residential area. Another group, CURE, is making jute bags for shopping and for giving to tourists going up to the snows to keep their consumer waste in. We are talking to another group, AROHI, about organizing a system for collection, segregation and disposal of garbage.

Manali is a popular tourist destination, and there is already a visible improvement in the tourist spots. There is less garbage around, and more garbage bins have been provided. Education through paper stickers, posters, etc, saying ‘no’ to plastic bags and ‘yes’ to using garbage bins is paying off.

The use of plastic bags from recycled material has been banned, but virgin plastic bags are still being used. Shoppers have a real problem putting things like sugar and pulses in paper bags as these tear easily. There is also no consumer-friendly solution for wet products such as meat. We are promoting the use of cloth bags for the dry products but for wet products the only way seems to be to recycle the use of existing plastic bags. SHARE is getting cloth bags made by women and women’s groups which we intend to give at a reduced price to at least 1,000 families. We hope these cloth bags will show a large number of families that they can manage with less plastic and therefore less waste.”

The main recipe for success, says Mr. Madan, is “Education, more education and tons of patience”! TRAS wishes them well in this endeavour.



“Dolma” - Children of the Himalaya, photo series by Marion Tipple

SPONSORSHIP REPORT by Joan Ford, Sponsorship Secretary

These children, from three of our sponsoring partners, typify the children TRAS is trying to help. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated. Please get in touch with the TRAS Office if you would like to sponsor one of these children. If you wish to give a sponsorship as a gift, TRAS will acknowledge this to your selected recipient.

MANISHA KORMOCHA MANISHA is a nine year old girl, born in a Nepalese village. She has a mother, an older sister and two older brothers. Her father went to India five years ago and never came back, nor have they heard any news from him. Her mother was always sick and sometimes mentally unstable due to the disappearance of her husband. Since they could not do much work in the village, they migrated to Kathmandu 8 months ago and are running a small shop on the roadside. Manisha has been admitted to the **BUDDHA MEMORIAL HOME IN KATHMANDU**. She has been to a village school for three years and already knows some Nepali and even a little bit of English. Now we are looking for a sponsor.

DAWA DOLMA is an eight year old Tibetan refugee child living in the **DOEGULING TIBETAN SETTLEMENT AT MUNDGOD, IN INDIA**. She has two sisters and a younger brother. She is actively attending school. Her parents are doing labouring work for others, and the income they earn is very meagre, so it is difficult to provide good basic needs and proper education for the children. Neither parent has a land allowance, so they have no other source of income and are genuinely facing difficulties in their daily life. So, they are requesting kind sponsorship assistance in order to give Dawa Dolma a good education and basic care.

TENZIN DECHEN THE TIBETAN WOMEN'S CENTRE IN RAJPUR, northern India, is requesting help for Tenzin Dechen. She is a 5 year old Tibetan girl, with an older brother and a younger sister. Her parents work at the Centre – her father is a cook and her mother weaves carpets at the TWC carpet weaving centre (from which TRAS purchases many handicrafts). Her parents are very poor, and the Centre would appreciate some help for their daughter, who is in the TWC Nursery School.

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Trans - Himalayan Newsletter

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Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

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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. _____

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