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TRAS

Spring Newsletter
MAY 2008

HEALTH CARE AND EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND
YOUTH IN TIBET, NEPAL AND INDIA

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

TRAS MEMBERS HAVE THEIR SAY

It's always great to hear from our members, and especially to discover that TRAS has made a positive difference in their lives here in Canada, as well as in the lives of the people our projects help.

We are thrilled that some of our members are thinking of innovative ways to help further. Last year, for instance, Riina Tamm planned a wonderful musical evening, the BCx3 Book Club raised funds and Sutherland Secondary School held a marvelous fashion show. This year, Ian Penn has again challenged TRAS members to match his donation of \$5,000 a year to continue the Buddha Academy Vocational Training project, Nancy Carroll has dreamed up a great way to help pay for higher education and Ken Kissock invites you to the adventure of a lifetime and a chance to give back to the people of Nepal.

Read on, to enjoy members' stories, and to see how you, too, can help.

HOW ARE THE KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN IN LHASA?



With the recent crisis in Tibet, we've been very concerned about the safety of the Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten and its 60 students. Fortunately, we've been able to contact Tsarong Phungyal, the principal of the school – he says they're fine.

TRAS is deeply saddened by the violence and loss of life, during both the rioting and the ensuing crackdown by the Chinese government. We remain extremely concerned about the tense situation, especially since the Chinese government has made it very difficult to find out exactly what's happening.

Russil Wong, President

PAYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Nancy Carroll knew she couldn't do it on her own, so she enlisted the help of friends and colleagues. Could others copy her example? Every community needs its nurses, teachers, engineers, as well as carpenters, tailors and electricians. The first students to complete their schooling at the Munsel-Ling School in the Spiti Valley have graduated. Some of them are keen to train for a profession which will help their people. Look at the four students on Page 3. Can TRAS members help them achieve this? It is a big commitment, so why not get help, as Nancy did?

- ◀ Write to a group of friends asking them to join you in helping a student
- ◀ Hold an event or a film evening (rent Nepali Films from TRAS).
- ◀ Ask for donations in lieu of gifts
- ◀ Ask your book club or other organization to help support a student

We'd love to hear from you if you have other ideas.

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NANCY EXTENDS HER SPONSORSHIP

"I had felt privileged and happy to be sending donations through TRAS for the past 14 years to enable my sponsored girl, Lobsang to attend school until she graduated. I was also in written correspondence with both Lobsang and her mother, Tsewang Sangmo. Last summer I received a letter from them, asking if there was any possibility of me providing the funds for Lobsang to fulfill her dream of obtaining a B.Sc. in Nursing.

After looking at the cost of the 4-year program, I gulped and realized that it would be difficult for me to do this financially, even though my heart was fully in it. When a friend suggested that I didn't have to do it alone, that he would help, and that we could also write up a 'fundraising letter'



Nancy and Lobsang

to send to other friends and colleagues, I was still a little unsure and shy about that prospect, however, knowing it was the only way to help Lobsang, I agreed to write the letter and included photos of her, and a story about her life. When I received a wonderful response and contributions from many people (now numbering 34 in all!), I was very heartened. When I told Lobsang and her Mom, they were both overcome with deep gratitude. TRAS worked closely with me, offering tax receipts and getting the funds to India in time for

the start of nursing college last Fall. Lobsang started sending me updates from nursing school, which I would regularly pass onto donors.

In February 2008, I had an opportunity to go to Asia and decided to visit Lobsang and her Mom for the first time. What a gift this was and the time spent with them will be in my heart forever. Lobsang was living in her nursing school residence in Hyderabad, South India, and she was waiting outside the school the day I arrived by taxi. She was just as I imagined—shy, sweet and bright, with a solid presence. Over the next few days, I was struck by what a privilege it is to be helping her to fulfill her dream to work as a nurse 'with the poorest of my people'. Lobsang told me that she is so very happy that she is able to attend college and she is enjoying every minute of it. I was certainly assured that she is in good hands, and is very well cared for. She was looking forward to getting her white student nurse uniform in another month. She assured me that she would always remember how others are helping her and always send prayers and blessings.

I also had the opportunity to visit the refugee settlement of Mundgod, to see Lobsang's Mom, and what a special meeting it was. When I was in the village, I was struck by how poor the family is and how impossible it would have been for them to send Lobsang to school and college. Her mother told me that long ago in Tibet, before their exile in India, Lobsang's grandfather, and her great-grandfather before him, had been doctors. It was even more meaningful that, with all they had lost, Lobsang was now able to carry on in a medical profession. The sincerity and gratitude of the family was amazing to me, and touched my heart deeply.

I am just about to write another 'update letter' to all of her sponsors (I do so about every 3 months) and I know they will all be as thrilled as I am to know that their donations are making such a massive difference in the life of one young woman, who will in turn make a difference in many lives".

BARB HADDAD VISITS BUDDHA ACADEMY

Eight years ago, I took time off from teaching and embarked on a one-year journey around the world that changed my life and my global perspective. In October of 1999, during my first trip to Nepal, I took part in a 22-day trek from Jiri to Gokyo. On the first day, I walked the last hour with a young boy, Pasang Lama, up to his village in Deoralie. It was through him that I learnt about child sponsorship with Buddha Academy in Kathmandu. He himself attended the Academy. His last words to me when I left his village were, "Please, don't forget me".

One month later, to Pasang's surprise, I visited the Academy. Since then, we have been pen pals. Dorje Namgyal Lama, the principal, dropped everything and gave me a tour while discussing many issues. He described several success stories of children being pulled out of



Barb and Friends

poverty, who today are on their way to higher learning thanks to generous donors. On that very same day, I decided that I would sponsor a child upon my return to Canada.

I was pleased to find out that one of the organizations that funded this institution was based in Vancouver. I phoned the Trans Himalayan Aid Society in the summer of 2000 and happily chose Tsering Dolma Sherpa, who came from a village in the same area where I had trekked, the Solukhumbu. She was 8 years old.

Later, I found a way to sponsor a second child, Pema Rinzin. I presented slide shows of my trek to

—cont'd page 6

SPONSORSHIP REPORT

The first students receiving all their education through the Rinchen Zangpo Society at Munsel-Ling School in Spiti have graduated. Several of them have been successful in obtaining university and college admission, proving that the long-held belief that 'Spitians are stupid' is a total fallacy. However, coming from poor families with little income, they are struggling to support themselves. Unable to work their way through college like their western peers (no one would employ a student in India), they are totally dependent on financial assistance and have personally written to us asking if we could help. TRAS would therefore like to offer them sponsorships for their courses. The amount varies depending on the location and type of course: College in Himachal Pradesh: \$680/yr, College in Delhi or Chandigarh: \$850/yr, Medicine or Engineering: \$1,050.00/yr.

Here are four case histories of the ten received from the students already in college. More will graduate from Munsel-Ling this summer and also require financial assistance in obtain a higher education.



Tanzin Dolma 23 years old, has successfully completed a B.Sc. Medical and is currently in her first year of a 5 year General Nursing and Midwifery Course at the Indira Ghandi Medical College in Shimla. She is one of 5 children in her family; her father is dead and her mother is ill and uneducated. \$680/yr.



Tsering Yangphel, 20 years old, from Hansa, a small village in Spiti. He comes from a family of six children whose parents are poor land workers earning only enough to keep their family alive. He is studying Engineering (Electronics and Communication) in Solan College, Himachal Pradesh, and has 4 more years of study. \$1,050/yr.



Tenzin Angmo, 21 years old, is only the second girl from Spiti to gain entrance into a Medical College. Her father is dead and her mother uneducated and poor. She is in the first year of her B.Sc.degree at the Government Medical College in Tanda. \$1,050/yr



Thuktan Yeshay Bodh, 21 years old, is studying for a B.Sc. at the Government College in Dharamsala. He is an orphan who has been cared for by his uncle and following his degree wishes to join the Indian Administrative Services to help the poor in Spiti. \$680/yr.



You are cordially invited to the
46th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
of the Trans Himalayan Aid Society

on Wednesday June 11, 2008 at 7:30pm

at Langara College

100 W. 49th Ave. (at Ontario), Vancouver, BC
Room A122b

A short business meeting will be followed by a social hour, for members to meet and chat with the TRAS Board of Directors.

Refreshments

Handicrafts

KAREN TROLLOPE-KUMAR VISITS DEKYILING AND MUSSOORIE

My husband and I lived in the Dehra Dun area of north-central India for a number of years, working on primary health care programs in the villages of the Himalayan foothills. We knew that there were large Tibetan settlements in Dehra Dun and Mussoorie, but had never had the opportunity to visit them. After our return to Canada in 1996, we became acquainted with the work of TRAS through long-term TRAS member, Jessie Kaye. We became TRAS members, and a few years later we began to sponsor two Tibetan children, whose families both live in the Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Settlement.

In November of 2007, I travelled to India and my sister-in-law and I paid a visit to the Dekyiling settlement, where Mr Kesang Wangdu, TRAS's contact person at Dekyiling, gave us a warm welcome. We visited the crèche, where we were greeted by about 25 happy children. They sang us a song and demonstrated their efficiency at their English ABC's! The TRAS-sponsored children came from their school, which is a little way away but still in the Dekyiling settlement. It was great fun to meet one of my sponsored kids, Tenzin Thinlay, a bright little boy with a mischievous grin. I met the mother of my other sponsored child, who is away at boarding school in Mussoorie. Mr Wangdu showed us the handicraft workshop, a large open building with many traditional Tibetan-style handlooms. Several women were working on the looms producing beautiful handwoven cloth which would be made into bags, traditional garments and other items.



Dekyiling children sponsored by TRAS

Mr Wangdu introduced us to a woman who'd arrived from Tibet recently. Both children and adults continue to arrive as refugees into India, enduring great hardship as they make the arduous journey. Sometimes parents are unable to accompany their children, but send them with experienced mountain guides. Their determination to seek a better future for their children is remarkable.



Sponsored child Dorje Phuntsok (rear)

A few days later, we travelled up to Mussoorie. Here thousands of Tibetan refugee children study in both day and boarding schools.

We visited the Central School for Tibetans, which was founded by the Dalai Lama in 1960, and offers comprehensive education to students ranging from kindergarten age to Class Twelve. The children study Tibetan language, history and culture as well as English and Hindi. We were met by three boys, two tall Twelfth class boys and our second sponsored child, Dorje Phuntsok. They showed us around the school grounds. The buildings and classrooms are plain but clean and well-maintained, with open areas where the children can enjoy games of cricket, soccer and basketball. I had a list of TRAS-sponsored children with me, and we enjoyed meeting quite a number of them. We took the boys to a little refectory where we could buy soft drinks. They shared with us some of the hopes and dreams about their future. Two of the boys are TRAS-sponsored, while the third is sponsored by a Swedish NGO.

Clearly, the sponsorships have made a great difference in their lives, enabling them to prepare for a promising future in their adopted land. For me and my family, the sponsorships have had a particular significance because the boys live in a part of India we hold dear. **The creation of those special bonds to another part of the world and another way of life is one of the great gifts of sponsorship.**

NEPAL STUDY GROUP ~ AFTER 10 YEARS

Ten years ago, TRAS, with CIDA assistance, took a group of Grade 11 students to Nepal to learn first-hand about international development. Recently, three of them have been in touch with TRAS.

Joanne Gaskell



Joanne doing research in the Philippines

Visiting TRAS projects in Nepal was the first time I had visited a developing country and the first time I saw, first-hand, the difference that Canadians are making overseas. I didn't know it then, but two TRAS projects we visited, Appropriate Agricultural Alternatives and a biogas generator in the Annapurna Conservation Area Project, would be central themes in my Ph.D. research on energy and agriculture a decade later. I am currently enrolled in Stanford University's Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in Environment and Resources, where I study how biofuels affect agricultural commodity prices and what this means for poverty and the environment. It's my hope that the research I'm engaged in might have a bearing on families such as those whom I met while touring the Annapurna Conservation Area.

Melanie Raoul

I was one of six youth participants in TRAS's Nepal Study Tour and Himalayan Education Project for young Canadians. The purpose of the tour was to visit development projects co-sponsored by TRAS, CIDA, and local Nepalese initiatives like the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) and return to Canada to inform and discuss with other Canadians, especially youth, what we had learned. In the months following my trip, I gave slide show presentations at high schools, community centres, local non-profits, and even at a juvenile corrections facility to educate young people about the social and environmental issues facing communities in Nepal and the work TRAS was doing to help support local initiatives and solutions.

The tour changed my perspective on life. Ten years later, at 26 years old, I have a much greater sense of perspective and can now, more than ever, identify the skills and emotional growth I developed as a result of my visit to Nepal. Venturing outside my comfort zone at 16 forced me to examine critically the impact our choices in the supposedly 'developed' West have on others around the world. I learned that positive social and environmental change is only possible when people work together. The experience gave me practical training in fundraising, event organizing, and public speaking and ignited a lifelong personal passion for politics and social activism, especially in the Free Tibet movement. I would like to take this opportunity to thank TRAS supporters and organizers for their ongoing commitment to changing young people's lives in Canada and overseas.

Jennifer Chow

For me, going to Nepal with TRAS meant going overseas for the first time in my life. It was my first great adventure, and will forever hold a special place in my heart and memories. Living up to the challenge of hiking through the Annapurna Region gave me strength and confidence. Getting to know and to adapt to the Nepali way of life instilled in me awe and respect for their culture, and left me with an everlasting love of dhal.

My experience in Nepal also helped me to put my personal lifestyle into a more global perspective at a time when I was laying the foundation for the person I am today. The messages were clear and profound. I learned that in many places, potable water, education, freedom and shelter are privileges, when they should be rights. That where there is a sense of community, there is enormous strength and potential. That a smile and a 'Namaste' (or its equivalent) can make all the difference in the world. All that I saw, felt, tasted, and experienced in Nepal encouraged me to think outside the cultural norms within which I was growing up.

Thinking about that trip has made my memories of Nepal even more vivid, and emphasized the value of the lessons learned from the experience.

my school's students and got them involved each year in the fundraising. As an outdoor educator, I combine eco-tourism and humanitarian aid into my lesson plans.

In the Summer-Fall of 2005, I volunteered at a home for destitute children in Kathmandu, a short walk from Buddha Academy. I had contacted Pasang to arrange for a meeting with the children. On that very special day that I had so looked forward to, I met for the first time shy and humble Tsering Dolma Sherpa and Pema Rinzin. It was great finally to see them in person. They had changed quite a bit from their photos. A much taller Pasang had almost finished his high school years there. We took several pictures that day, and I learnt a lot about their life at this wonderful boarding school. I hope to return again next year and perhaps assist some of the teachers in their classroom. **Satisfaction comes from giving. I would like to thank TRAS for the opportunity to give back to the people of Nepal.**

NEWS FROM BUDDHA ACADEMY

In December we received the sad news that the Principal, Dorje Namgyal, had suddenly fallen ill, and been diagnosed with stomach cancer. After his surgery, the doctors recommended a course of chemotherapy. His wife took him to Bangkok for a second opinion, which confirmed the necessity for chemotherapy, so they are back in Kathmandu, where he is undergoing treatment. Medical facilities in Kathmandu are good, and we know he is being well looked after, both by the doctors and particularly by his family and staff at the Academy. He is still too weak to return to the office, but the Academy continues to run smoothly, thanks to Dorje having trained an excellent staff. We all wish him well in his recovery.

The happier news from the Buddha Academy comes in a recent report about last year's exam results. "We have much pleasure to report you today that this year's School Leaving Certificate results have now been declared with some delay. Altogether in the country a total of 274,210 students sat for the SLC examinations. Out of this, a total of 58% managed to pass. In our school 27 students (13 girls) sat for this exam. 22 students have passed in first division and 5 in distinction (over 80%). This is indeed a wonderful result and a matter of pride and happiness for all our staff and students. In the last 6 years, 99 students have passed SLC from this school, mostly in first divisions and several distinctions. We never had failure in SLC in this school. Indeed this good result is due to wonderful support from our donors and sponsors like TRAS. We are deeply grateful to you".

TRAS congratulates the students and staff for this excellent achievement!

TRAS has taken up Ian Penn's challenge to match his donations to the Buddha Academy Vocational Training project. Thank you, Ian! We are looking for \$5,000 a year for the next three years. Argyle and Sutherland Secondary Schools continue to raise funds for this project. Are there other young people who would like to help fellow students across the world?

THIRD NEPALI FILM FESTIVAL RAISES \$2,000 FOR BUDDHA ACADEMY

The TRAS board members are very excited to have successfully completed the Third Annual Nepali Film Festival, held on Feb 24th, 2008 at Langara College in Vancouver. The Festival proved to be the biggest of all the events that TRAS has hosted in recent memory. We are very thrilled not only because we were able to raise money for Buddha Academy in Nepal, but also because we were able to promote eleven emerging Nepali film directors to the public and media of Vancouver. We showed 13 films in all.

TRAS raised more than \$2,000 (after paying film directors and expenses) from the Festival for Buddha Academy in Kathmandu, Nepal. Moreover, TRAS had a very good opportunity to reach out to the public through many different media.

This year the audience was much larger than we had anticipated, and this has certainly given us a boost and the confidence to continue organizing the Festival on an annual basis.



Nancy Sherpa sells Nepali jewellery at the Himalayan Market during the Film Festival

We would like to thank the enthusiastic members of Langara Rotaract Club for their huge support in making the Film Festival a hit. The energy and the positive vibes brought by these young people reminds us that they are solid pillars of society and have great potential to bring about positive change.

The Festival would certainly not have been possible without the help and support of Langara College Continuing Studies, the Nepalese Cultural Society of BC, and our generous sponsors C.M.Considine, QC, Consul General, Nepalese Consulate, Victoria, Salma Farzim, GAP Adventures, Everest Trekking Canada, Second Wind Personal Training and Group Trekking, and Videomatica. Finally, we would like to thank the TRAS members and all the audience who came out to support this fundraiser for Buddha Academy. We had much positive feedback from the audience, along with comments on areas where we can improve. TRAS has taken all the comments seriously and will work even harder to present a bigger and better film festival in 2009.

~ AjeetGorkhali

TREKKING FOR TRAS

Adventure of a lifetime ~ A way to give back



Imagine trekking in a beautiful country and making a difference to others at the same time!

Ken Kissock of 'Second Wind Personal Training and Group Trekking' is offering such an opportunity to a lucky few. His trek to the awe-inspiring Sagarmatha National Park in Nepal in October will include two unique features: a Buddhist lama will accompany the group to interpret the art and architecture of the historic centres in the Park, and in Kathmandu trekkers will visit local TRAS-supported projects, getting a behind-the-scenes glimpse of another side of Nepali life.

Ken, who has successfully led other fundraising treks for charity, explains his mission. "As a fitness trainer and wellness consultant I have always believed in the holistic approach to health. That includes being socially committed to helping others less fortunate than myself. I also wanted my business to be connected to quality organizations that help make our world a better place.

My long time passion for hiking led me to join a trek and fundraiser for the Alzheimer Society of BC. We trekked in Nepal to Gokyo Ri and committed to collect \$10,000 each in donations. It was in Nepal that I fell in love with the people of the Everest region, so much so that I wanted to return on a regular basis. I added trekking to my business and

have been back twice to the Himalayas, both times leading treks and fundraising for Canadian charities.

This fall my trek to Nepal, 'A Walking Tour of the Sagarmatha National Park', is a fundraiser for TRAS. I felt that it was time to do something for the people of the Himalayas. Gord Konantz, the owner of Everest Trekking Canada, the long-established and well-respected company for which I lead the treks, is a member and supporter of TRAS. After chatting with Gord about TRAS and his commitment to the Buddha Academy, I felt that supporting TRAS projects in Nepal would be a great chance to give back to the people of the Himalayas.

We are looking for trekkers who will commit to collecting \$3,000 each in donations for TRAS. For some people this may seem hard, but I am committed to helping them with their efforts to get donations. TRAS will provide tax receipts and information about the projects. The fundraising can be done before and after the trek – think what your slide shows will be like after the trek!

So if you want adventure and a chance to help the less fortunate, this trek in Nepal is for you!"

The deadline for signing on is mid June.

See TRAS website www.tras.ca for full details.

TRAS

Supporting health and education for children & youth in the Himalayas

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PROJECTS ON THE GO

After a long, hard winter it's almost time for building schemes to start up again in the remote northern Indian valley of Spiti. At **Munsel-Ling School**, a team of local workmen is descending on the unfinished toilet block which TRAS is funding through the UBC medical students' initiative, and it will be ready for use before long. Further up the Valley, in an even more remote spot, the nuns of **Dechen Choling Nunnery** will be completing the hall which TRAS is funding through the Jamyang Foundation. The nuns have impressed the local people with their hard working ways, and they set a great example for the young women and girls.

In both communities, programs on women's health, maternal health and HIV/AIDS are being planned this Summer, for the female students and the women of the surrounding areas. The UBC medical students are planning to carry on their basic health assessments and training at Munsel-Ling School, to supply much-needed new bedding, and will be looking into planning greenhouses for year-round vegetables to improve the children's health further.



We have approved three-year extensions to the funding of **Lhasa Yuthok Kindergarten, Little Flowers Creche and Dekyiling Creche**. The Tibetan children in all three are part of the hope for the future of the Tibetan people.

Sacred Lakes and Headwaters of Asia's River Systems: Protecting Tibet's Water Resources



On January 23, Tashi Tsering, Ph.D. student in UBC's Resources Management and Environmental Studies Program and the Contemporary Tibetan Studies Program, gave a fascinating and inspiring talk on his experiences working collaboratively with various Tibetan, Chinese and international groups for the protection of Tibet's water resources. Thank you Tashi!

We had a wonderful response to our Christmas appeal to complete the funding of last year's projects and to carry on our work this year – thank you, one and all, for your generous support!

NEW MEMBER, BRAD, COMMENTS:

"I recently saw a report on the lives of women in Nepal...of course I expected to hear about how life is difficult...but what I was not expecting was to hear a report about the level and degree of abuse that goes on for many women in Nepal - I just wasn't expecting that...but reports like these, even though not directly relevant, only add to my distress and concern for Tibetans...I would worry about the future of our planet, and the future of displaced people even if I didn't watch these news reports...but the news reports only verify what I'm already sensing..."

I find a little inner strength and solace in knowing that there are people like you and organizations like TRAS so close to home and so similar in their views...people acting on their compassion."

TRAS has worked with Nagarik Aawaz and continues to work with Buddha Academy to improve life for young