
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Spring Newsletter

April 2002

Greetings from our Patrons

Dorothea Leach writes: Forty years ago Dr. George Woodcock and his wife Inge spent some time in India to do research for the book "Faces of India". In one chapter we learn how by pure chance they came in contact with Tibetan refugees and had the honour to be

gressed to much larger schemes. The Indian Government provided land in southern India and TRAS, often in cooperation with other NGOs (and, after the first years, CIDA) was able to aid in the establishment of infra structures in the agricultural settlements,

greetings and best wishes to all members upon this very special 40th anniversary. She also congratulates all of us for the devotion, compassion and effort shown by the many faithful members in continuing the work she and George started such a long time ago.



Patron Dorothea Leach with Mrs. Taring

received by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This memorable encounter and visits to an orphanage and some of the camps confronted them with the dreadful plight of these people and the Woodcocks resolved there and then to do something about it. The TIBETAN REFUGEE AID SOCIETY (TRAS) was founded upon their return to Vancouver and those of us who joined them in the sixties did not realise that we and TRAS would grow old together!

Looking back over the many years we can say with justification that it was a fruitful aging. From urgent relief such as providing funds for food, medication, shelter, blankets, etc., we pro-

offer vocational training to hundreds of young Tibetans, support the building of schools, dispensaries, housing - the list of our involvement is long and very diverse.

A decade ago it was decided to concentrate our efforts along the Himalayan range and the name of the Society was changed to TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY, still TRAS.

George Woodcock died at the age of 82 in January, 1995, after some years of poor health. Inge, who recently spent several weeks in hospital, now lives in a home. She continues to be interested in the work of TRAS and sends her

Dorothea joins Inge in sending her greetings and congratulations to all. In turn, the Directors thank these inspiring ladies for graciously continuing to be Patrons of the Society.

The 40th Annual General Meeting of TRAS will be held on May 22, 2002. See separate invitation.

Finally, CIDA Says Yes!

After months of waiting and hoping, we finally have the answer from CIDA that both our project proposals have been accepted! So our record stands unbroken - TRAS has never had a project turned down by CIDA! It seemed

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like touch and go, as emails flew back and forth - could we spend some funds before June 30? Of course we could. But the next request was to reduce the budgets for the two projects! So we did. Then a stream of questions from the selection committee - all answered, but not on time. It's difficult to answer questions by 9am Toronto time on Monday when they are only received in the Vancouver TRAS office at 2pm on Friday, after our office has closed! There were a couple of nail-biting days until we heard they had accepted our late answers. And finally, on April 5, came the good news - the vocational training project at Buddha Memorial Children's Home and Academy was accepted, and the Kullu Valley Health and Sanitation Project had been cleared by CIDA'S environmental assessment agency and was all set to go! Whew!

The purpose of the vocational training project at Buddha Academy is to train 15 tailors, 6 carpenters and 10 electricians over three years. They will then be assisted in finding employment in these trades. These purposes reflect the goal of reducing youth unemployment and poverty by training girls and boys as skilled workers who are useful to their community. It is expected that at least 75% will graduate and find employment in their trades. A complete report on the vocational training projects at Buddha Academy can be found in the December 2001 Newsletter.

The Kullu Valley Health and Sanitation Project is highlighted next.



SHARE's multi-purpose workers

Kullu Valley Health and Sanitation Project - Phase 3

TRAS has partnered with an Indian non-governmental organization (ngo), SHARE, to improve the lot of hill people in the villages scattered up the steep Kullu Valley above the town of Manali in Himachel Pradesh, Northern India. These people have been passed over by the tourist boom that hit Manali in recent years, and they live much as they have for hundreds of years. They are extremely poor, eking out a living from a little agriculture and animal herding. Amenities are non-existent. Health is poor, and sanitation is unknown.

SHARE is a very small organization run by an Indian who wanted to help these people. The organization has a project officer, a woman in charge of women's programs and a handful of 'multipurpose workers' - young women trained in primary health care and sanitation. SHARE also runs day care centres and an income generation scheme for mothers, with a small, clean shop in which their weaving is sold.

The first priority was to ensure clean water through proper sanitation.

TRAS' first sanitation project with SHARE involved the building of 200 toilets in 20 villages. They are simple two-hole pit toilets. SHARE provides plans, cement, a ceramic hole with foot-prints and ventilation hardware. Each villager pays a small sum and provides the labour. The toilets are housed in wooden, stone or brick sheds, near the house, or under the balcony on the steep mountain side. Extra benefits, besides uncontaminated water supplies, are accessibility in the severe winters and for the disabled and elderly, and privacy for the women. In TRAS' second project with SHARE, 250 toilets were to be built in a further 20 villages. However, the response from the villagers was so great, and SHARE's planning so careful that the funds stretched to 381 toilets in 38 villages! The idea has caught on, and in some villages, the people are building their own without SHARE's help (but with SHARE overseeing that the job is done well). Already there is a noticeable reduction in some diseases.

TRAS has been fortunate to work with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) on this project, and in April, 2002, CIDA approved Phase 3 of the project. The name has been expanded to the KULLU VALLEY HEALTH AND SANITATION PROJECT, because several health initiatives are now included as a further step to improving life in the villages.

400 toilets will be built, with the villagers paying a little more of the cost (except in the case of the poorest and widows) and the multipurpose workers will continue to monitor their use and maintenance. These workers are all young women, admired and trusted by the village women - but they can be tough when they have to be! Dirty toilets are closed until the villager agrees to abide by the rules!

The new components in the project illustrate how an ngo, having once gained the trust of the villagers, can move to the next step in primary health care. SHARE plans to immunize 4,800 children and as many adults as possible. Basic health education will be given to key women from each village, so that they, in turn, can spread the message. A



Typical houses in Kullu Valley village

family health plan has been started, with 400 families paying a few rupees for a 'health card' which allows them to have a monthly visit from the multipurpose worker. Better health leads to the children attending school more often, with a resulting increase in literacy and SHARE is having much success in encouraging families to send their girls to school, and to keep them in school longer. SHARE's daycare centres, where the children are taught basic letters and numbers, help the parents to accept the benefits of education. The mothers, with a little free time on their hands, are encouraged to join the weaving work, and their products sell well.

SHARE will also be building toilets in two shanty towns which house migrant Tibetan and Nepali workers, and setting up immunization clinics for their children.

SHARE has asked TRAS for \$75,000. TRAS contributes \$25,000, raised through donations from our generous Canadian members. CIDA will match the TRAS funds 2:1. The Indian Government supplies a few vaccines; Rotary International is providing the polio vaccine, and the villagers are contributing towards the costs of the toilets and a small health fee.

AND THERE'S ALWAYS ONE MORE PROJECT REQUEST----

The next step will be a vocational training program in computer skills and hotel work, so that the young people from the villages may take advantage of the jobs available in the towns. SHARE has started a pilot project in this area, and has found unexpected benefits in the delaying of the marriage age for girls and the reduction of the number of children a working woman wants. TRAS expects to receive a proposal for this vocational training and will present it to CIDA for the next round of project selections in 2003.

Hats off to our Volunteers

Over the years, TRAS has been helped by a number of 'behind the scenes' volunteers, who are to be found doing a variety of jobs for the Society. We have a faithful group of newsletter 'folders and stuffers', whose number was augmented for several issues by the cheerful, nimble fingered TRAS Youth Project participants, before they all scattered to their universities, etc. With the aid of computerized address labels, a postage metre and printed return envelopes, this job is a far cry from 10 years ago, when Horace Miller stuck on every stamp, glued on the address labels and rubber stamped the return address - a long job! Horace died last October after many years as a sponsor and donor.

Then there are those who help at the annual meetings and events and staff the information tables for TRAS, and do hours of tedious office work. We want to introduce you to one of them - CAROL GIVTON.

Not content with just sponsoring children, Carol has offered her help and computing skills. She has helped at 2 annual meetings, the TRAS Benefit evening last November and the Tibetfest in March, where she staffed the TRAS information table at 3 events. But the 'behind the scenes' job she does in the office is the most necessary. Carol has put into chronological order the complete Minutes of the Society, 40 years' worth, culled from the UBC Archives and copied by Carol, from damp boxes in the storage room of the Lutheran Centre and from directors to fill in the gaps. Finally we have a complete set of Minutes on paper - and now Carol is taking this project two steps further. She is going to scan the pre-1990 Minutes into the computer (post-1990 Minutes are

already electronically filed), and then she will save them all as Word documents so that they can be accessed easily and information can be searched for via key words. This will be invaluable to anyone who wishes to do research about TRAS or write a history of the Society. This all represents months of work - and we thank Carol very much for her help!

Vocational Training Project Finishes!

After three years, the Department of Education (in the Tibetan Government in exile) vocational training project is complete! 122 young people have received training, many of them school dropouts who would not have had a chance without this project. TRAS has helped bring self-sufficiency to most of these students, who are now working in the Tibetan communities, and the Do E has managed to find funds for the rest, who want to continue with their studies.

The total of 122 is comprised of: 38 pre-primary Tibetan teachers, 19 Tibetan language teachers and 65 skilled workers in the fields of auto mechanics, TV repair, hotel management, cooking, tailoring, thangka painting, computer hardware, computer application and journalism. The TRAS and CIDA funded project cost \$114,815 - less than \$1,000 per student.

Pre-Primary Teacher Training

The second Pre-Primary Teacher Training is also funded jointly by TRAS and CIDA, and helps to address the two problems of a shortage of teachers for the Tibetan schools and lack of professional skills in many of

the temporary teachers who are employed in the system. These temporary, unskilled teachers could not be employed permanently and were not able to receive a proper salary without a formal teacher training. Thus the project will benefit the participants, but even more importantly, it will give the Tibetan children in exile a far better start to their school years.

We have just received the second report from this project, and all is going well. The training is going smoothly,



with no participants dropping out due to health or other reasons. The participants are studying hard and putting in their best effort. The final exams will be held in September. The curriculum is based on the latest model of teaching methodology, with a few interesting additions:

The children will be taught a few practical life skills, such as “folding dusters and dusting dusty objects”. They will also learn how to carry a chair, put it down and sit on it. They will learn how to pour carefully (no waste here!). And

we are glad to see that nature study starts this early. Among the usual alphabet and number exercises are fun games like dominoes and bingo, and as well as starting to learn their Tibetan alphabet, the children will also learn English, and sing such favourites as ‘Oranges and Lemons’ and ‘Peas Porridge Hot’. One wonders what the children will make of some of these oldies!

One large section covers health, hygiene, nutrition and first aid - all very practical.

Tibetfest a Success!

Overall, the organizers say, the recent Tibetfest in Vancouver was very successful and they are happy with the results. Financially they broke even, thanks to several grants, and culturally, they feel the participants have gained enormously. TRAS had an information table at 3 events, and our President, Marion Tipple, gave a wonderful slide show and talk to a fascinated audience on a sunny Sunday afternoon (if we had had Vancouver’s usual rain, no doubt more people would have come to Marion’s talk instead of working in their gardens!).

Here is Mati Bernabei’s report.

In many ways, Tibetfest was very successful - in terms of spreading the word about Tibet, and in terms of opening many eyes to Tibetan lay culture. 2021 people were in attendance. Many people at the performances were amazed at the quality of the performances, and at the depth and range of artistic styles presented. Many said they had previously only seen monastic arts, and had assumed that the only Tibetan arts were monastic. The audience loved the shows, despite some ‘learning curve’ glitches in the programming, and the workshops and talks were all well attended and well received.

We feel that it is important for groups like ours (Canada Tibet Committee) to bring Tibetan lay culture to the public. The monastic arts and Buddhist teachings are being well presented by Buddhist centres and religious leaders, but the lay arts seem to have been neglected in the meantime. Tibetan lay arts are as rich and diverse as the monastic arts, and their preservation is just as essential to the preservation and growth of Tibetan cultural statement.

An added benefit was the teaching of the local Tibetans by some of the artists, who gave 6 hours of music and dance workshops for the local Tibetans, thus enhancing their skills and helping their culture to survive.

Going It Alone

We talked in the December 2001 Newsletter about the fact that TRAS may have to 'go it alone' more often, due to the CIDA cutbacks. One project which TRAS has taken on this year is to supply computers to the Spiti School. (See story in the September 2001 newsletter). President Marion Tipple visited the school in 2000, and was asked if TRAS could provide computers for the use of the children and for adult education classes. There was an urgent desire to give the older children computer training, so that they can be competitive in modern, high-tec India. Their first request was far too ambitious, but after scaling it down to a manageable size, TRAS agreed to fund the purchase of computers and a printer, and the training of women and children in basic computer skills. In India, as in the rest of the world, computer literacy is becoming a necessity, and TRAS is happy to help the energetic staff of this remote school to give the children the best advantage they can. The project will cost \$13,232.

Sponsorship Report by Joan Ford



Pasang Buti Sherpa



Cheme Karto Gurung Cheme



Sonam Yangchen

Our thanks to our faithful sponsors, who have nearly all renewed their sponsorships for the current year. We do appreciate the 'lifeline' you offer to the children.

This month we are featuring children from Buddha Memorial Home and the Spiti School, both institutions for which we have great respect. We know the children who are lucky enough to receive shelter and education at them will be well cared for and given the best chance to become self sufficient.

Pasang Buti Sherpa She belongs to a poor Sherpa family, living at present in Kathmandu. Her father has two wives. Pasang is the daughter of the first wife, but she is living with her stepmother, who treats her very badly. Her stepmother has two sons. Pasang's father works as a porter for trekkers, and is facing financial difficulties at present. Therefore, he brought his daughter to the Buddha Memorial Home and requested help. Pasang is 10 years old, and in Grade 2.

Cheme Karto Gurung Cheme, 8 years old, comes from a very poor family in Mustang, in the far north of Nepal. She has 3 siblings. Her parents are farmers with a small plot of land where they grow wheat, maize and millet if they get a good rainfall. Cheme used to go to the village school when it opened for 6 months a year. Her father

wants her to have a good education, but could not possibly afford it. This winter, when he was on a pilgrimage, he happened to hear about the Buddha Memorial Home and brought Cheme to the school, begging for an education for his daughter. She has been accepted and is looking for a sponsor.

Sonam Yangchen The Spiti School, in a remote region of northern India, has taken in this girl and is looking for a sponsor for her. The school writes: Sonam is a very lovely and sweet girl, seven and a half years old. She comes from Hurling village, very close to the Tibetan border. Her parents are farmers. They want to give her a good education, but without help this will not be possible.



Children at one of SHARE's day cares.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

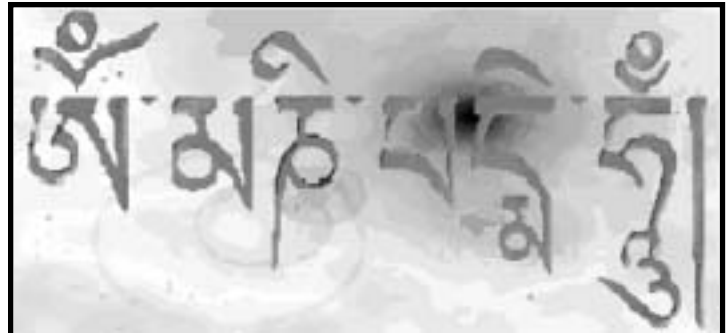
TRAS EXECUTIVE

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 Mrs. Dorothea Leach
 President Dr. Marion Tipple
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Om Mani Padme Hum
Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus



Trans - Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

Yearly Membership donation (\$20) \$20
 Possible Additional Donations:
 Annual Donation of **\$300** 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.
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You are cordially invited to the 40th Annual General Meeting of the

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

Wednesday, May 22, 2002
at 7:30pm

Lutheran Campus Centre
5885 University Blvd.
Vancouver, BC V6T 1K7

The short business meeting will be followed by refreshments
and a slide show illustrating

“CURRENT TRAS PROJECTS in INDIA, NEPAL and TIBET”.