



Each of us must learn to work not just for his or her own self, family or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama

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Yearly Membership donation (\$20) ----- \$ 20

Possible Additional Donations:

Monthly Donation of \$25 for the “Child Development and Education
 Project” at a residential school -----

Monthly Donation of \$10 for a child in a “Family and Community
 Development Project” -----

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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alleys and tunnels connecting houses which are built around enclosed courtyards, thus providing protection from the fierce winds in the river gorge.

At Khobang, at 8,400ft, the trail passes through a tunnel, and doors to the houses open off it - again protection from the howling winds.

Tukche is the capital of the Thak region, once an important trading village, where traders coming with salt and wool from Tibet would barter with traders carrying grain from the south. The main street is impressive with the large two-storied houses, carved wooden doorways and balconies. These were homes of the Serchans (surname of some of the girls) and other merchants. Here too the vegetation changes - to dry, desert-like country.

Jomson, the administrative headquarters for the region is the last

Thakali village - those further north are inhabited by people of Tibetan descent. The inhabitants of Thini, a village across the river, are still followers of the ancient Bon-po religion that predated Tibetan Buddhism.

Several villages were fortified, and ancient kings could easily control the trade routes." In Upper Mustang a group of villages are peopled by the Gurungs, a Nepalese name often taken by Tibetan settlers (for ease of assimilation), but Ans can tell by the facial features which girls are Nepali and which are of Tibetan descent. At 12,402ft Lo Manthang, the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lo, sits on the high plateau like a fortress, with only one small entrance. Within its fortified walls are 150 houses and numerous lama residences - and the palace of the King, with whom Ans had requested an audience.

"My heart went out to the King," she says," who is deeply interested in preserving the Tibetan culture, religion and traditions. In the early 1990s, the Dalai Lama sent an emissary to meet with the King and ask him how they could help him realise this aim. The King said that his main concern was to preserve the Tibetan written language, because this is no longer taught. Before the Emissary returned to India, two promising young boys were chosen to go back with him to Dharamsala to receive an education there for 10 years, after which they would return to Mustang to teach the spoken and written language."

Although the area is tiny, there are many ethnic tribes. In southern Mustang we find the Newaris who are one of the most cultured groups of Nepal. Some of the girls have Newari names. The Thakuri are a high Hindu caste, which includes the Nepali King's family.

Moving north, the tribes are probably all from Tibet - the Gurungs, Thakali, Bhotiya and Lobas. Their features, dress and traditions are very Tibetan. Many of these people are fine traders (a Tibetan speciality), but it will be noticed that the fathers of nearly all our girls are farmers. Because of the difficult agricultural conditions, their economic outlook is not good. Upper Mustang is mostly above 12,000ft, the land is barren and eroded, also due to 100km/hour winds blowing for about 6 hours every day, and there is a shortage of water.

It should be obvious by now how important our Mustang girls' scholarship project is!



Main street in **Tukuche** (Tukche) village - 8500ft/2591m.

Tukuche was once the most important Thakali village. This village was the meeting place where traders coming from Tibet, with salt and wool, bartered with traders carrying grain from the south.

DETECTIVE AT WORK

Ans Muller, intrepid trekker and leader of many arduous but fascinating trips to little-visited regions of Nepal, northern India and Sikkim, has another talent! We have discovered that she is an amateur anthropologist! When Ans led a trek to Mustang in 1996 (Mustang story by Dorothea Leach and Beth Whittacker in previous Newsletters) she fell in love with the area and was delighted to discover that TRAS had agreed to start a scholarship program for Mustang girls.

She promptly undertook to figure out where the girls, whose scanty histories we were sent, came from and what their family names might tell us of their race. She says "Once I started, I became so totally wrapped up in my Mustang 'research' that it took me quite a bit longer than origi-

nally expected." Ans has now collected together a wealth of information about the area, the family names, and the location of the villages. She also has a reading list about the area.

If you would like to learn some details about your sponsored girl, Ans will be delighted to provide what she has. Write to her c/o the TRAS Office.

Meanwhile, here is her overview.



"First, a general comment. The age of a girl and the class she is in do not mean that much. Quite often parents may have taken the child out of school for an extended time because they were unable to pay the school fees, because they needed the girl's help to look after younger siblings or to work in the fields, or because the girl may have been sick. If

the TRAS sponsorships are enabling older girls to get an education now, that is wonderful.

Mustang is the ancient Tibetan kingdom of Lho, more or less autonomous but under the auspices of Nepal since the last century. It is so totally different from the rest of Nepal that it's like a different country. This thumblike projection of Nepal into Tibet, which surrounds it on three sides, is physically like the Tibetan plateau, and is said to be even more barren and desolate.

Mustang is divided into Upper (northern) and Lower (southern) Mustang. Most of the girls come from Lower Mustang, and most of the village schools are in this area."

Ans has found most of the girls' villages on the few maps which exist of Mustang, and having trekked the route from the southern "border" with Nepal to the northern border with Tibet, she can give us a firsthand picture of them.

"Ghasa is the first Thakali village along the Kali Gandaki, the sacred river cutting a channel between the peaks of Annapurna 1 and Dhaulagiri. These two peaks are only 38m apart, and the river flows between them. In its upper reaches, people call the river Thak Khola, thus the name Thakali for those who live in the region. Ghasa is the southernmost limit of Tibetan Buddhism, and here the vegetation changes from subtropical trees to mountain pines and birches.

Larjung, the next village where some of our girls live, has narrow



*A group of Muistangi women heading south for the winter.
The journey to Pohkara is a 8-10 day walk!*

FRIENDLY FARMING IN NEPAL

In a hilly, semi-tropical area of Nepal, not too far from the pollution of overcrowded Kathmandu, a wonderful experiment in friendly farming, called APPROPRIATE AGRICULTURAL ALTERNATIVES, is making quite a difference to many people's lives. TRAS learned of this project in 1996 and has been helping ever since, co-funded by CIDA. Several directors have visited the experimental farm, as did the Nepal Study Program participants, and all have found its methods to be a simple way to make a profound change for the better.

The problems in this country of small farms are many — steep, narrow terraced fields which erode, overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, depleted soil fertility, water contamination, poor nutrition, sickness, low income, low status for women - the list goes on and on.

Enter AAA with a vision to improve the standard of living and the fertility of the land through sustainable agriculture.

On its home farm and in regular visits to the participants' farms, AAA is promoting organic farming and its beneficial impact on the land.

Farmers who sign up are called "associate farmers", or *afs*. They are given initial training at the AAA farm, then receive regular follow-up visits at their own small farms. Local groups and committees are set up to identify and address problems. The support by AAA is ongoing.

The objectives are many. The biointensive farming methods regenerate the soil depleted by chemicals. Organic fertilising increases soil fertility and crop yield. Waste disposal into

compost piles and grey water ponds keeps the crops mulched and watered. Mulching helps prevent soil erosion. Companion planting cuts down insect damage. Indiscriminate use of chemicals by illiterate farmers who cannot read instructions is stopped, thus reducing poisoning of people and water. Reduction of water contamination from pesticides halts the elimination of beneficial insects and improves health. Fodder production reduces damage by foraging animals.

Increased crop yields and income generation encourage farmers to stay on their land rather than leaving their farms to look for work in Kathmandu, a city already populated and polluted beyond its carrying capacity. As most vegetable farmers are women, the added income gives them self-reliance and a new status. Encouraging the family to eat some of its own produce leads to better nutrition.

And what of the results? TRAS has been funding the training and extension aspects of the project, and a recent report shows the following results for a six-month period:

- ◆ the 60 vegetable farmers (mostly women) and 98 general farmers in the project received regular visits;
- ◆ 10 new *afs* were trained in organic farming;
- ◆ the *afs* in one village had hands-on training in composting and liquid manure making;
- ◆ 42 *afs* in one village upgraded their double digging skills;
- ◆ 4 monthly meetings of 60 *afs* were held to discuss vegetable growing and marketing;
- ◆ 12 visits a month were made by AAA staff to farms;

- ◆ different varieties of both winter and summer vegetables were grown, and seeds distributed;
- ◆ organic fertilizers were distributed;
- ◆ four Peace Corps workers and four Nepalese counterparts were trained for one week, so that they can introduce organic farming methods in remote areas of Nepal;
- ◆ 137 farmers and trainers from other organizations were given one-day trainings;
- ◆ the rice produced on AAA farms sold well;
- ◆ marketing of organic produce (mostly carried to the city by women) continued 4 days a week, with new market areas explored.

Tangible results so far:

- ◆ health of soil and people has improved;
- ◆ nutrition has improved because *afs*' families are eating more vegetables, more variety and ingesting less chemicals;
- ◆ most of the women *afs* are illiterate, and unable to earn money in other types of employment. The supplement to family income has been significant and there is more money for basic family needs. More women are becoming interested, through word of mouth;
- ◆ status of women has improved;
- ◆ leadership skills are being honed in the committee meetings and evaluations. All feedback from the *afs* is utilized to improve the project.

TRAS is proud to be a partner in such a successful grass roots project!

(continued from page 3)

into beginners, intermediate and seniors. The number of students has grown to sixty. When we met Tsarong Phungyal we were impressed with his command of the English language, which he had learned at a school in Darjeeling as a child and which he had not been able to use for many years. He also proved to be an excellent teacher, as was evident to Drs. Lynn and Frank Beck when they visited Lhasa a year ago. They spent some time visiting the school, discussing ideas with Phungyal and talking to the students. The Becks found that the students' command of English, after only 6 months of study, was such that they could answer questions and converse quite well.

Phungyal has had to move his little school several times; either the house in which he had rented a room was torn down, or the owner needed the space - all very disruptive for him and his students. However, he has now managed to find a place with a

5 year lease, and our commitment to support him gives him the security and peace of mind to apply himself to his chosen task, to which he devotes such energy and great interest.

Although he is quite a frail man, Tsarong Phungyal is driven by a desire to help young Tibetans have a better future. There is no doubt that all of us feel he deserves our continued support and appreciation.

AND NOW A KINDERGARTEN

In April last year we had a new proposal from Phungyal for the establishment of a kindergarten, as many parents could not afford to send their children to the government school. The Directors agreed that TRAS should support him in this effort too, and the sum of \$4452 spread over three years seems a modest contribution to his hard work.

The kindergarten is located in the "Lhasa Cinema Hall courtyard", according to the application. 56 children attend, being looked after by two teachers. They learn Tibetan and

Chinese phonetic symbols and arithmetic, which prepares them for the entrance exam to the primary school.

This month TRAS received a progress report from Phungyal, stating:

"The children can now say prayers, recite the times tables, and their writing and reading have improved too. They can sing songs and recite verses in Tibetan and Chinese. Last year half the number of children have gone away to primary school and many new ones have taken their place. During the Chinese Spring Festival and the Tibetan New Year's Day, the Kindergarten will be closed for two weeks only. Classes start again on March 1. No holiday in summer".



Lhasa English Kindergarten - set up on April 13, 1998

Tras T-shirts



Adult sizes: medium, large and extra-large (they are roomy!)

Colour: white; b/w leopard; black, red and blue border.

Sale Price: \$15.00
(postage \$2.00)

Order them from the office

AN ENGLISH SCHOOL IN TIBET

Dorothea Leach

In 1987 Barry and I finally were able to fulfill a wish of long standing, a visit to Tibet. Naturally through our work for TRAS and several journeys to India and Nepal to see the settlements of Tibetan refugees as well as through reading many books, we formed a picture of Shangri-la, flawed no doubt by the presence of the Chinese but still a fascinating destination. The first glimpse of the Potala, the Dalai Lama's Palace, was an unforgettable sight and although we had been warned, because of the 12000ft altitude of Lhasa, not to dash around upon arriving at the hotel, we could not resist the temptation and were soon mingling with hundreds of pilgrims from many parts of the Buddhist world in front of the Jokang, their holiest temple.

In the next few days we criss-crossed the city on foot many times, marvelling at the colourful murals, impressive statues, gorgeous wall hangings and thousands of other artifacts in ancient temples, monasteries and palaces. We had to remind ourselves that we were actually in Tibet and not just dreaming. We

were amazed at the size and architectural beauty of some of the houses which at one time had belonged to wealthy people. In contrast to other tourists we were fortunate to have letters of introduction from Tibetan friends in India to visit their relatives and therefore had a chance to see inside one of these houses which, of course, now belonged to the government.

We were invited to have lunch in a mansion previously belonging to an old aristocratic family. Our hosts rented two rooms on the upper floor

the others. One gentleman, Tsarong Phungyal, expressed a desire to start an English school in Lhasa, explaining that the knowledge of English would enable young Tibetans to find work in the growing tourist industry. We took notes, and upon returning to Canada, we discussed this with our directors who were all very enthusiastic about a project like that in Tibet.

After much correspondence back and forth, and Phungyal's tremendous effort to find a suitable place, the school started in 1990. The initial

donation from TRAS was used to purchase furniture, books and school supplies, and our annual contribution is now \$800, which covers the rent, a small stipend to the teacher and helper and some books and educational material - a very modest invest-



Lhasa English School - August 1998

with a view onto the Jokang. Through a huge archway we entered an inner courtyard where at one time servants lived and horses were stabled. A steep staircase led to a wide gallery where our hosts and many members of their family welcomed us. Fortunately three of them spoke excellent English and translated for

ment with excellent results.

Most of the students are young adults who are either unemployed or have menial jobs, all hoping to improve their lives by acquiring a new and useful skill. The classes are held in the evening and are now divided

(continued on page 4)

presentations given and more to come! Recent talks have been to schools, youth detention centres, Girl Guides and Rotarians. The girls have also helped TRAS to staff our information table at several functions - and they are the great team who stuff and mail this newsletter! Thanks, girls!

COMPUTER TRAINING

The Computer Training and Desktop Publishing Course at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics ran into a slight problem. The course uses Macintosh computers, but several of the students were returning to offices outfitted with PC/Windows computers. In order for them to learn how to handle the programs they would be using in their offices, TRAS agreed to purchase one Pentium II computer. All is now well.

AAA and the LHASA ENGLISH SCHOOL

In looking through recent Newsletters, I realised we have never told the full story of these two projects. You will find them inside this issue.

And last, but far from least,

WE TAKE OUR HATS OFF TO:

◆ **JESSIE KAYE**, who has completed her TOILET PROJECT! She writes "We raised enough money for eighteen toilets, plus one a donor sent money for at the beginning of the project when I didn't even believe we could raise enough for ten! After the Newsletter article about our involvement in this project, I had a letter from Jean Pensom. I had lost touch with her after we both left Deep River, and I had forgotten that I once badgered her into joining TRAS. It

was such a happy surprise hearing from her, and a second letter came with a cheque. So the 18th toilet was bought with her help. She is 95 and obviously is as keen to help as she ever was. That was a happy ending to our project!" WAY TO GO, JESSIE! And don't forget, folks - you're never too old to help out!

◆ **THE LONG-TIME MEMBER** who sent a welcome \$2,000 for the Tibetan Ph D student, who was very grateful for the help. We have since heard from Mrs. Rinchen Choegyal, the Tibetan Minister of Education, that he is a fine young man, doing extremely worthwhile work for Tibetan youth in India and Nepal. She can't wait to get him back in Dharamsala, and asked us to tell him "to hurry home". So if anyone else wants to help him on his way, send your gift to the Office and it will be forwarded to him.

◆ **BOB PARKER** of WESTSIDE GRAPHICS who did the superb job of printing our new brochure. The firm helped us financially, too. THANKS, BOB!



THE 37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF TRAS

will be held on Wednesday, April 28th, 1999 at 7pm. at the Lutheran Campus Centre, 5885 University Blvd., Vancouver.

A short business meeting will be followed by entertainment, refreshments and a craft sale.

"Images of Tibet" Slide Show"

**by Kami Kanetsuka
Dr. Marion Tipple
Drs. Frank and Lynn Beck**

Thangka Painting and Exhibition
by Kalsang Dawa.

Sponsorship

Joan Ford

TRAS received a large number of letters, photos and school reports from sponsored children in different areas. These were all forwarded on, and you also should have received a statement of dues for 1999.

Some children's reports were missing and the settlements have been

asked to report on these children. As soon as I hear, I will write to those concerned.

I always have some case histories of needy children and will be very happy to facilitate any new sponsor's contact with a child.

SPRING CLEANING

Here we are at the end of the 37th year of TRAS' work with Tibetan refugees and the people of the Himalayas - 37 years which have brought them better health, education, vocational training and agriculture, and better care for orphans, the elderly

and the environment. The Tibetan language and culture are more than clinging to life (in exile) and in small and large ways TRAS has made a difference to the development and administration of many communities. Our Annual General Meeting will take place on April 28 - see notice on page 2 and our July Newsletter will contain the annual overview of TRAS' activities and projects.

Meanwhile, let's clean house by tying up loose ends and catching up on news from the past year.

OUR NEW LOGO AND BROCHURE!

Our new, colourful, informative brochure has drawn rave reviews, with several members asking for supplies to distribute locally. If you would like to do the same, just let the Office know. The snow leopard logo is adapted from our beautiful T shirt (a few left - a bargain at \$15.00, from the Office) and it will now be used as the official TRAS symbol.

GREAT RESPONSE TO THE PRESIDENT' SAPPEAL FOR FUNDS!

Very many thanks to the 58 TRAS members who promptly replied with welcome extra donations. \$12,223



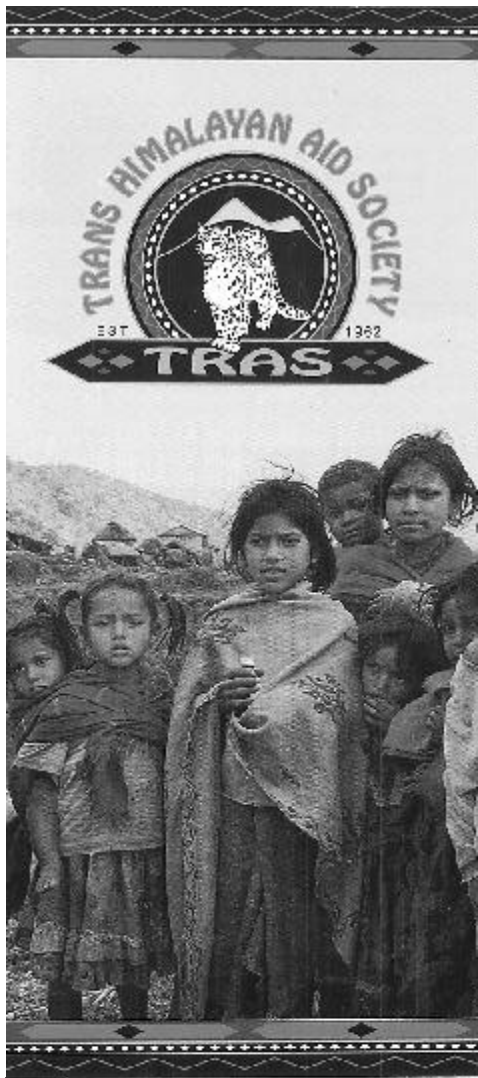
has been sent in so far, with more promised.

In practical terms, this money could - renovate an old warehouse and outfit it as a youth fitness centre and library for a Tibetan settlement which has had problems with its young people; - AND purchase 2 computers for a Tibetan high school to help the children have a better chance at employment, now that India is becoming so "computerized"; - AND train a lab technician for the Delek Tibetan Hospital!

These are just three of the recent worthy requests the Board of Directors is considering for 1999. If more members wish to help out, it is never too late to send a donation! THANK YOU!

THE NEPAL STUDY PROGRAM

The participants are up to 40 slide
(continued on page 2)



Inside This Issue

<i>Sponsorship</i>	2
<i>Hats Off to</i>	2
<i>English School in Tibet</i>	3
<i>Friendly Farming</i>	5
<i>Detective at Work</i>	6