

GENERATION TRAS

Of course you've heard of GENERATION X – well we have our own interesting generation here at TRAS – one in whom we can all take great pride and satisfaction. There's no moaning about how hard its lot is, no wondering what to do in this difficult world. The people who belong to GENERATION TRAS are dedicated, determined, hard working people. They are Tibetans who are dedicated to preserving their people's identity and their culture. They are determined eventually to return to their own country. They are prepared to work hard in pursuit of these goals.

We can call them GENERATION TRAS because these are people who were sponsored by TRAS as children and as young people. We were able to give them a helping hand and the knowledge that someone cared for them at a crucial point in their lives. And now we find them popping up all over!

They are the school teachers, the principals, the secretary at a big childrens' home, a settlement leader. They work in the offices of the Tibetan Government in Exile and they keep the culture alive.

We have no formal survey to tell us exactly what each TRAS-sponsored child is doing now. Some may

have fallen on hard times, some may have emigrated (but they are probably self sufficient); but more and more in our work with the Tibetan communities in India and Nepal, we are finding that the letters we receive come from people who were sponsored by TRAS and who are now fulfilling the hope that they would grow up to help their community survive.

What a wonderful justification of the early efforts of George and Inge Woodcock to find sponsors for Tibetan refugee children, and of the response from Canadians in sponsoring thousands of children over the past 37 years!

At the 37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of TRAS in April we had the pleasure of meeting a young man from this GENERATION TRAS. His name is Kalsang Dawa and we share his story with you on Page 4.

37th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The TRAS AGM was held in Vancouver on April 28, 1999. President **Peter Roberts** welcomed the 70 members and friends, and told of the year's highlights. The new pamphlet



and the fund raising drive were two successes, as were the many talks given by the Nepal Study Tour participants and the public education undertaken by several TRAS members around the country.

Sponsorship Secretary **Joan Ford** reported 304 children currently sponsored - up 15% from 1998. She warmly thanked all TRAS' loyal sponsors for their commitment.

Projects Director **Lynn Beck** chose to give her report as a slide show on the Becks' recent trip to Tibet and Nepal, highlighting the many TRAS projects they visited. (A full list of TRAS projects will appear in the September Newsletter)

The meeting was followed by slide shows given by Cynthia Kanetsuka on the Tibetan Children's Village in Dharamsala and Marion Tipple, who, by using two screens
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and sensitive camera positioning, gave us a moving look at Tibet today. Her images clearly contrasted the idyllic Tibet with the reality of life there today. Refreshments and a successful craft sale followed the excitement of an auction! Marion Tipple had generously donated a beautiful Tibetan chuba which we auctioned, the money raised to go to the project chosen by the highest bidder. Anni Elliston was the successful and most appropriate winner.

Anni works for the Tibetan cause through CTC, and plans to study herbal medicine. She had birthday money from her mother burning a hole in her pocket, waiting for Anni to find the ideal gift. She is thrilled with the chuba, which she modelled for us, and fittingly she asked for the money to be sent to one of our traditional Tibetan medicine projects. A win-win outcome!



"Here's a photo of me in my wonderful Tibetan dress" - Anni Elliston

The unaudited annual financial statement showed:

UNCOMMITTED FUNDS:

| | 1999 | 1998 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Receipts: | | |
| Investment interest | 73,285 | 76,075 |
| Donations | 44,532 | 37,618 |
| Admin - CIDA | 26,644 | 25,183 |
| Admin - general | 139 | 251 |
| Total Receipts | 144,600 | 159,647 |
| Expenses: | | |
| Project Costs: | | |
| Public education, monitoring, bank charges, fax | 10,589 | 26,135 |
| Administrative Costs: | 42,040 | 45,684 |
| Total Expenses: | 52,629 | 71,820 |
| Increase (decrease) in revenue: | 91,970 | 87,827 |

CHANGES IN UNCOMMITTED FUNDS:

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Current year's Commitments to | | |
| Projects | 80,091 | 223,218 |
| Increase (decrease) | 11,879 | (135,390) |
| Uncommitted funds beginning of year | 535,841 | 671,232 |
| Uncommitted funds end of year | 547,721 | 535,841 |

COMMITTED FUNDS:

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Receipts: | | |
| CIDA | 133,679 | 170,764 |
| TRAS Projects transfer | 80,091 | 223,218 |
| Donations | 75,972 | 67,567 |
| Total Receipts | 289,742 | 461,549 |
| Disbursements: | | |
| to CIDA projects | 258,648 | 202,117 |
| to TRAS projects | 137,247 | 163,740 |
| Total Disbursements: | 395,896 | 365,857 |
| Committed funds beginning of year | 374,165 | 278,472 |
| Committed funds end of year | 268,010 | 374,165 |

A member asked why TRAS received less from CIDA in the past year. Lynn Beck replied that CIDA had committed much more to TRAS, but several factors had delayed payments. The funds will be received in the current year.

Copies of the audited financial statement are available at the TRAS office.

Sponsorship

Joan Ford

I have the case histories of two young boys from the Tibetan Refugee Colony in Dehra Dun, Northern India.

NGAWAMG TSERING, aged 5. His parents come from U-Tsang Province, Central Tibet. In desperate straits, they moved to Dehra Dun, where the mother was given work at the Dekyiling Tibetan Handicraft Centre. She works as a weaver. Her husband is weak and unhealthy most of the time. The income they receive is just enough to feed them and they do face hardship trying to educate their little boy, who has just started in Kindergarten.

PALDEN DORJEE, aged 10. His parents come from U-Tsang Province, Central Tibet. They fled from Tibet in 1960 and first took refuge in Bhutan. Later on, they were reset-

tled in India and work as weavers at the Handicraft Centre. They can afford day-to-day living for themselves and their four children, but face enormous problems trying to send their children to school. A sponsor for this youngster could give him a chance for the future.

Please contact the TRAS Office if you are interested in helping these boys.

WINDHORSE - Tibetan Movie July 9 - 15

VANCOUVER PREMIERE OF CONTROVERSIAL TIBETAN FILM, "WINDHORSE", at the Ridge Theatre, July 9 - 15.

This is the first film to depict dramatically the reality of life in Tibet today under China's rule. Filmed mainly in the safer realm of Nepal, there are a few scenes actually shot in Lhasa during an anti-China demonstration! The film was wildly popular in India and Nepal, and bootleg cassettes have appeared all over the world, wherever Tibetans live, so eager have they been to see this accurate and powerful story of Tibetans in Lhasa today.

Now we in BC have our chance to see this film, which was awarded the top prize at the Santa Barbara Film Festival. Tibet support groups, including TRAS, are hosting the opening night, July 9. There will be information tables staffed by several Tibet support groups, and guest speakers from the Tibetan community will introduce the 7:30 and 9:35pm screenings.

WINDHORSE is a powerful story of modern Tibetans in Lhasa struggling to maintain their identity. After more than 40 years under China's rule, Lhasa Tibetans find themselves a minority in their own country,

with few opportunities.

Dolkar is a female singer whose chance for a recording contract depends on the influence of her Chinese boyfriend. Her cynical alcoholic brother has only disdain for the People's Republic and her grandmother refuses to hide her forbidden Buddhist religious objects from the boyfriend when he visits their home. The entire household faces a crisis when they harbour Dolkar's cousin, a Buddhist nun who has been arrested and tortured for protesting a ban on the Dalai Lama's image.

Ridge Theatre info: 738-6311



KALSANG' S STORY

as told by himself and his wife, Mati Bernabe

It was delightful – and very satisfying – to meet one of the TRAS vocational training scholarship recipients in the flesh at the 37th AGM. Kalsang Dawa is a very talented thangka painter, and he treated us to an exceptionally beautiful display of his thangkas. At present these are not for sale, because Kalsang is working towards putting on an exhibition of his paintings and the whole process of creating a thangka. Meanwhile, he is selling cards (photographs of his thangkas) – if you are interested in obtaining unique, lovely art cards, contact the TRAS office.

Much of Kalsang's story cannot be told – the terror, the scenes imprinted on a young man's memory, the heartbreak of leaving home – but what he shares with us is gripping enough.

Even as a small child Kalsang loved art and always wanted to become an artist. He went to school until the age of about 13, when he and several other children were kicked out of the school. None of them was given a reason for this dismissal, and his parents, being uneducated and mere factory labourers, had no power to intercede on his behalf. Eventually he gained admission to a very poor, overcrowded school, but he grew frustrated and disenchanted with the terrible conditions and finally he left.

When he was 15, his uncle helped him to find an art teacher in Lhasa. His teacher was a wonderful old master artist who had spent many

years in prison due to his work for Tibetan freedom. Under this teacher Kalsang apprenticed for three years in painting temples and traditional furniture decoration. This was also when Kalsang started to learn more about Tibetan history and the Dalai Lama. Kalsang's parents had been terrified to teach him these things, because if he mentioned even one word about the Dalai Lama in school, the whole family would have been severely punished. His parents had seen so many horrific things in their lives that they did everything they could to protect their children, even if this meant denying them knowledge of their Tibetan heritage.



Thangka by Kalsang Dawa

But Kalsang's art teacher was old and full of spunk, so he taught Kalsang as much as he could, both about art and about Tibet. When

Kalsang finished his training and started looking for work, he was very discouraged by the conditions in Tibet. He felt that as a Tibetan he had no chance for a decent future in Tibet. The really good jobs were given to the Chinese, and as a traditional artist he was very limited. He could not study further styles of traditional art nor acknowledge through his work the history of Tibet or Tibetan Buddhism. He knew enough by now to realise he was being held back by government policy bent on frightening Tibetans from exploring their own history.

Around this time he joined in some of the demonstrations for Tibetan freedom and human rights – a heady but terrifying experience, which has left him with overwhelming memories of cruelty and repression. He felt frustrated and dejected. With nothing productive open to them, he and his friends started getting into trouble - some were arrested, some were injured - and Kalsang decided that if he wanted to have a decent future, he would have to leave Tibet.

His parents agreed, though in doing so they knew they would probably never see their son again. So Kalsang and one friend set out for Nepal. They managed to join a larger group at the border and together they walked for about one month, over the Himalayas into Nepal and finally to a road where they were able to get a bus to Kathmandu. He eventually arrived in India in a state of shock. On the route through Nepal he had traded all his extra clothing for food, so that by the time he arrived in India he had nothing but the clothes he was wearing. The Tibetan Government in Exile helped the newcomers to reach Dharamsala where Kalsang had to

find his footing and decide on a path for the future.

Kalsang and his family hoped that he would be able to continue the art training that he had begun in Tibet, and he gained admission to the thangka painting school at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, studying under the master artist, Ven. Sangye Yeshe. For Kalsang, the prospect of combining his love of art with work towards preserving and developing a Tibetan tradition was a dream come true.

Since he was a new arrival from Tibet, and a student who could not yet earn his own living, Kalsang was awarded a scholarship to help with his expenses. At the time he knew only that the money came from “some Westerners”. Much later he found out that the scholarship money had come from TRAS as part of the thangka painting vocational training project.

**THE TRAS SCHOLARSHIP
ALLOWED KALSANG TO BEGIN
HIS NEW LIFE IN EXILE BY
REALIZING HIS DREAM OF
STUDYING TIBETAN ART.**

Kalsang was more fortunate than most new arrivals because his uncle had escaped to India several years before and was able to provide some financial support. After six months in the thangka school, Kalsang saw that many other students were living under much harsher conditions than he, so he and his uncle agreed that he should give up the scholarship money so that it could go to another student.

Thangka painting students study intensely for 5 to 6 years before gaining enough skill and experience to start taking commissions for their work. During the training period they are responsible for all their own ex-



Thangka painting students — sponsored by TRAS

penses – rent, food, clothes and art supplies. For the majority of Tibetan refugees, sponsorship is an absolute necessity.

Kalsang’s teacher, Ven. Sangye Yeshe, is a wonderful man – his whole life is thangka. He teaches his students art, but he also teaches them the ethics and integrity which must be inherent in their work. He teaches them that since Tibetan culture is threatened, they must always do the best quality work they can. By painting high quality thangkas, true to the traditional ways, they are taking on the responsibility of preserving Tibet’s history and ancient teachings. It is important that those in exile take on this responsibility, because the people inside Tibet face more restrictions.

Survival in exile is particularly difficult for adult arrivals from Tibet. They do not speak Hindi or English, and even those few who received some sort of training in Tibet are not qualified for the jobs available in India. Thangka painting is one of the few careers in exile in which they can participate on an equal foot-

ing with those Tibetans who were raised in exile.

After finishing the training program, job prospects for painters are good, with relatively good wages. Some artists work independently, others work directly for monasteries in India or Nepal, or for institutions such as the Tibetan Medical Institute in Dharamsala. Many experienced painters take on apprentices, thus continuing the tradition.

Kalsang had a few apprentices after he finished his training. Initially his teacher sent 3 or 4 students who had already begun their training to get some extra instruction from Kalsang. Then, after a few years of work, Kalsang took on a full time student, named Kunga. Kunga escaped from Tibet in the early 1990s and studied for a few years at the Transit School, but was not happy there. He loved art and wanted to do work that would keep him close to Tibetan culture, so he came to Dharamsala to ask Kalsang to take him on as an apprentice. Kalsang agreed, and Kunga requested and

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was granted a TRAS scholarship. Kunga studied under Kalsang for more than four years. His TRAS scholarship has finished now, but he is at a point where he can begin to earn money. He recently took 6 months to work in temples, painting interiors, in Bodh Gaya and Bir. This was a wonderful way for Kunga to broaden his experience, working with teams of seasoned painters.

Kalsang, meanwhile, decided to immigrate to Canada with his Canadian wife, Mati. He hopes eventually to teach here, but first comes the exhibition of his thangkas and a demonstration of the whole process of creating a thangka, from the grinding of the minerals for pigments to stretching the canvas, drawing and painting the figures and finishing and framing it. Kalsang was fearful that North America would expect him to churn out quick, cheap, watered down thangkas - but he has been heartened by the warm response his work has met so far. His work ethic and his deep love for Tibet and its culture make him determined to do his part in preserving, with the highest artistic quality, Tibetan art - not only for the Tibetan people but also as an important contribution to world art.

When asked about the benefits of the TRAS scholarship program, Kalsang responded that the most crucial reasons for the program are the preservation of Tibetan tradition and providing Tibetans with the means to learn and perpetuate the ancient art form. Kalsang said that the opportunity to study traditional art was very limited inside Tibet. Many of the master artists have died and the remainder are still tentative about teaching openly due to fear of reper-

cussions. For Tibetan refugees like Kalsang and Kunga, the TRAS sponsorship program has provided an invaluable opportunity for them to study and take pride in their national heritage. The bonus is that they are able to become self-sufficient.

Kalsang expressed his heartfelt gratitude to TRAS for helping him and many other Tibetans to study Tibetan art. Without a scholarship many would not have been able even to consider fulfilling their dreams.

REVIEW OF AN OLD PROJECT

Recently, **Ans Muller**, an ex-Director and long-time friend of TRAS, went trekking in Ladakh. Ans always treks as far off the beaten track as possible, and in getting to the back of beyond last fall, she had to pass through Leh, the capital of Ladakh. There, she stopped at the Tibetan Handicraft Centre to see how our recent projects (June 1996 Newsletter) were doing.

“The General Secretary, Punchok Tsering, was obviously very pleased to have an attentive audience and gave us a quick rundown of all that had happened to the Tibetans since their arrival around 1960. To bring us up to date on TRAS projects, he told us that the RATION STORAGE BUILDING was now finished and the new roof was on. This building was greatly enlarged to store their supplies from November to June each year, for protection against weather and rats. We then visited the building, where a sign clearly indicates that this was sponsored by Canada.

After that, we visited the WOMEN'S WEAVING CENTRE, for 50 lady weavers. In 1989, when we first

saw the building, it was a dark and gloomy workroom. TRAS agreed to do a solar retrofit for heating and lighting, to train 50 weavers and to set up a creche. The work is completed and it is light and bright with windows all along opposite walls. Several ladies were at work on the looms. A French couple had paid for 2 Tibetan amas (mothers) in the lovely small creche where the children of the weavers are looked after. On the side of the large weaving room was a small room where the waste from the carpets was processed and put to excellent use. We saw a man scraping the finished carpets and the fluff that comes off is then used to stuff 3ft by 1ft small mattresses, which were neatly stacked along the wall.

A Western lady dropped into the weaving centre to tell Punchok something, and said to us, “What this man has done in a few years is FANTASTIC!” TRAS agrees, and thanks our donors and CIDA for sponsoring this project.

HATS OFF AGAIN to Jessie Kaye whose public education about TRAS has spread even further! We recently received a copy of the May 99 NIAGARA ANGLICAN newsletter, which has a 2 page spread entitled: WE ASKED WHAT THE HIMALAYANS NEEDED... AND THE ANSWER WAS TOILETS! Seven large photos and two stories tell about TRAS' Kulu Valley toilet project and Jessie's successful efforts in raising funds to pay for 19 toilets! Thanks again, Jessie!

TIBETAN THANGKA PAINTING

Mati Bernabe

Buddhism was introduced into Tibet in the seventh century AD, and since that time Tibetan Buddhist sacred art has grown and flourished. The Tibetan word “thangka” refers to a work done on cloth and set in a silk or cotton frame. A thangka depicts Buddhist deities or historical figures in Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Almost every image is symbolic of some aspect of Buddhist teachings and is a reminder of the details, the depth and breadth of the teachings.

In creating a thangka, the painter first prepares the cloth by stretching it in a wooden frame, and then applying a thin mixture of glue and calcium chalk to create a strong and flexible base on which to paint. The artist then prepares the outline of the composition by fixing particular geometric shapes on the cloth. The diagonals are set in place, and then the vertical and horizontal lines. Grids with proportions specific to each figure are then pencilled in and filled with the details of the image. Finally background details such as clouds and mountains are added.

The proportions, symbolic images and most of the colours depicted on the deities are strictly stipulated in ancient Buddhist texts and teachings. All Buddhist artists must conform to those stipulations. In thangka painting, the artist’s creative freedom can be expressed in all aspects of the painting outside of the image of the deity. Design elements such as the background, subtleties in shading and the positioning of figures on the can-

vas may come from the artist’s inspiration.

When the original pencil drawing is completed, painting begins. Traditionally, thangkas are painted with mineral colours – the artist grinds stones into a fine powder and mixes it with glue as a binder. Real gold and silver are used for finishing details and glimmering highlights. The larger background areas are painted first (earth, sky, then flowers, trees and animals). Depth is accomplished by shading. The sacred figures are then painted, starting from the outline and working inwards towards the centre of each figure. With a delicate hand and a fine brush, lines are added to outline figures and shapes and add minute detail to the work. Gold is applied to highlight the images. The gold is burnished with a finely sharpened stone to bring forth textures and shimmering effects. The final detail to be painted are the eyes of the figures. When the eyes are painted, the thangka is considered to come “alive”.

On the back of the cloth the artist writes three mantric syllables – om, ah and hum – at the sites of the forehead, throat and heart of any gurus, Buddhas, or other divine figures, symbolizing the pure

nature of enlightened body, speech and mind.

When the painting is finished, it is sent to a tailor to receive a frame of silk brocade. Tibetans traditionally hang the completed thangkas in temples and in shrine rooms in their homes.

Now that he is in Canada, Kalsang’s main challenge is getting the materials. When he immigrated, he brought a 33kg bag of rocks and ground pigments as hand luggage. He got some strange looks from confused customs officials, but they let him through! The brocade frames have to be made in India.



Thangka by Kalsang Dawa

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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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