
Trans - Himalayan Aid Society

Winter Newsletter

December 2000

A GIFT FOR CHRISTMAS



This is the story of a two-way gift, given by TRAS members and CIDA to the Tibetan community in India, and now returned to us many times over. What have they sent us? The good news that the young people whose vocational training has been paid for by TRAS and CIDA (Department of Education Vocational Training Project) have done exceptionally well, have nearly all finished their training and are getting on with their lives as self supporting, contributing members of their community! What better Christmas gift could we have than the success of these young people!

They may not have sent us gifts of lords a'leaping and maids a'milking - but here's what we got!

19

Tibetan
Language

Teachers • **10**

Tailors stitching

• **7** Secretaries typing

• **3** Beauticians snipping

• **3** clever Cooks • **2** Fashion

Designers • **2** Electricians

• **1** Hotel Manager • and a Sales-

woman in a Tibetan store. **Meanwhile**

10 motor mechanics • **2** TV repairwomen

• and **1** general mechanic will all have finished their training in the next few months **leaving 8** thankga painters perfecting their art for a further two years.



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As you join family and friends this Christmas, remember the gift you helped to give these young people – and the wonderful gift of hard work and determination they have given back! The Directors of TRAS wish you and yours a joyous and peaceful Christmas and all the best for 2001.

Sponsorship Report

by Joan Ford, Sponsorship Secretary

Another year has almost passed and again I want to thank you all for such great support and interest. TRAS now has over 300 children sponsored in Nepal and India.

The **Mustang Girls Project** is to be phased out as our present girls complete their schooling. The areas in Mustang are remote and it is difficult to administer this project. However, we are sure that the education of a quarter of the present young girls of Mustang must make an eventual difference in the community. Thank you to all of you who

responded to this special project.

Dorje Namgyal, the principal of the **Buddha Memorial School in Kathmandu**, wrote recently asking TRAS if it would be possible to take on a further 30 children. With your help, we'll have a happy answer for this dedicated and hard working man.

I also had a letter from the **TCV School in Suja, India**, telling me that the school is overflowing – 800 students in a building intended for 700! Of these only 200 have sponsors, and the sponsorship secretary writes, "Please help us

and as soon as you have sponsors, case histories will be sent".

All TRAS sponsorships are now \$300.00 per annum, and TRAS also asks sponsors to take out a \$20.00 annual membership to cover the cost of the newsletter and transmission of funds overseas.

I would love to hear from some new sponsors!

Best wishes to you for a happy Christmas.

Here are sample case histories of children looking for sponsors:

KALSANG DADON aged 8, female. Born in the Tibetan Refugee Colony, Dehradun, India. Her parents, Lobsang Chodak and Samten Dolma, came from Lhokha Province, in southern Tibet. They both fled from Tibet in 1959, seeking refuge first in Bhutan and later in northern India.

Her father is very old, and her mother is only able to earn a small income from her handloom weaving. There are 4 other children in the family. Kalsang is a healthy little girl, in Class 1, and a sponsorship for her schooling will be of great help in making a future for her.

PHUNTSOK GURUNG aged 8, male. Born in Jarkot, Mustang. He is now at the Buddha Memorial School in Kathmandu. "His parents are poor peasants in Mustang. He has two younger brothers and a little sister. They have only a small plot of land on which they grow a little bit of barley and potatoes. They live in a small hut made of stones and mud. When there is no rain for the crops, the family has to go without food. So the father sometimes works for others in order to get some money. There was not enough money to send his children to school. So one of our Board members, Mr. Wangyal Lama, recommended his admission to the School. We have taken him in. He looks clever and healthy. Now we are looking for a sponsor."

PHAGMO TSO aged 18, female. Phagmo was born in Tso-nong in Amdo, an eastern province of Tibet, to a simple peasant family. When she was five years old, her parents separated, and she was cared for by her mother, Khando tso, while her older sister went with her father, Druk bum. Finding no possibility for education for Phagmo under the Chinese, her mother sent her into exile in India.

She joined the Tibetan Children's Village School in Suja, northern India, on December 15, 1998, and is now reading in basic class 1. Her subjects are English, Tibetan and Math. Phagmo also takes active participation in school co-curriculum activities. She wishes to go back to Tibet after completion of her studies.



His Holiness the Dalai Lama surrounded by the latest batch of CHWs

Community Health Workers

We have just received this satisfying report from the Delek Hospital in Dharamsala:

“The Tibetan Delek Hospital has been conducting Community Health Workers training since 1981 to train grassroots health care providers for Tibetan refugee settlements in India and Nepal. So far, we have trained 200 CHWs in 21 sessions, thus ensuring one or more trained Health Workers for each settlement. **These achievements have been made possible with the financial support of TRAS.**

The 21st session, which ended in June, trained 13 candidates from nine different sites – stretching from south India through the Himalayan region to Ladakh and Nepal. All the candidates are mature people who have worked in their communities in the past. Their curriculum included practical clinic expe-

riences every morning, night duty in the hospital, and classes on eye care, dental therapy, nursing and Tibetan medicine. They were each given copies of “**Where there is no doctor**”, in English and Tibetan, “**Delek’s Pocket Book for CHWs**” and “**Mother and Child Health**”.

The CHWs form the backbone of the health support structure for the exiled Tibetan communities living in the rural areas of India and Nepal. Their training is therefore of great significance in achieving an optimum quality of care, which we feel is most necessary. **TRAS has greatly contributed to reaching this objective, with support from CIDA.”**

Whenever possible, Delek Hospital tries to arrange a group audience for CHW trainees with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Here he is, surrounded by the latest batch of CHWs.

CIDA UPDATE

At press time, the CIDA projects committee is meeting, to decide which organisations projects should receive funding in 2001. The committee has to study 65 proposals in two days! In the September Newsletter, there was a list of projects to be sent to CIDA. The continuation of the highly successful integrated rural development project run by ACAP in the Anapurna region of Nepal is the largest project TRAS has on the books. CIDA asked for a complete evaluation of the previous phases of this project before they would consider looking at the proposal for a similar project to be run in new villages. The evaluation was done and CIDA has all the information.

The second project which TRAS proposed is the Department of Education Pre-primary Teacher Training. Again, this is a further phase of a very successful project. Last time, 38 trainees became fully qualified teachers recognised by the Indian Department of Education, and therefore able to work full time at regular salaries. The need for such teachers is still great in the Tibetan community, to give the children a good start in their education and to build up their knowledge of the Tibetan language and culture.

We hope to hear before Christmas whether TRAS has been successful.

Didila's Story Part III

The story of Didila, a Tibetan refugee, brings to life so much of the work done by TRAS over the years. TRAS helped to set up some of the early settlements; gave support to the road workers in the Kulu Valley; trained nurses; was deeply involved in the admission to Canada of the planeload of Tibetans in 1972. Although Didi and TRAS only came together in 1999, our paths have been closely linked for years.

We left Didila and her grandparents in Kathmandu, with Didi recently recovered from a serious case of chickenpox. The news came that the Indian Government was setting up wonderful settlements for the Tibetan refugees, and they all moved to the Nepali-Indian border.

There they stayed for 8 months, their numbers swelled by constant streams of new arrivals from Tibet. There were more than 3,000 people in a makeshift encampment. There was much illness and many deaths. One area of the site was set aside for cremation, and the smoke never stopped. One day, Didi was playing with other children when two large birds starting fighting above them. One dropped whatever it had in its beak at Didi's feet – it was a tiny baby's hand. Images like this still trouble Didi – when her own children were born, she remembered the horror and sadness of that moment every time she held her babies' hands.

Finally, huge trains arrived late at night to move the refugees on. Another frightening experience – this was the first train she had seen. It was made up only of luggage cars, into which they were herded like animals. Luckily their animals were able to come too. So Grandfather brought his precious horses. They were taken to the railhead at Patankhot, at the edge of the Himalayan foothills and as they disembarked, they were ordered to assemble

in groups of about 100. People from the same area were grouped together, but others were divided by age. Children were separated out, so were the elderly, and the middle aged were put in a third group. Didi was so frightened at the thought of being separated from this remnant of her family that she, a tiny thing, hid under the skirts of her Granny's chuba, and so moved on with the middle aged group to Kulu-Manali camp. (In fact, the children were all



Didila as a teenager

taken to the big homes, like TCV and THF, and were very well looked after and educated – but the thought of another separation was too much for Didi to bear.) Manali is a hill town, in a beautiful mountainous area, with the impressive Boas River running through the town. It is rather like BC. The Tibetan camp was by the river, and made up of beige Indian Army tents. However, life for the Tibetans was extremely hard, because, although the Indian government gave them shelter and food, they were expected to work on the military road being built through the mountains. Each day they were bussed up to the

construction area, where they had to blast rock, carry it to the road site and lay the road surface – all by hand. It was backbreaking work. Grandfather had been able to buy donkeys again, and set off to trade in the mountains with the colourful Ladakhi herdsmen in their wide skirts and funny hats. Granny was considered too frail to work, but little Didi did work with the road gangs for a while. Her grandparents did not want her doing this harsh work, and she was allowed to stay behind to look after her granny.

She spent her days collecting firewood and cooking for herself and her granny. They stayed there for one and a half years. There was no possibility of an education for Didi – after all, this was a camp for middle aged people, and in any case, her grandfather did not feel that an education was necessary for girls – their role was to marry well and raise a family.

They then moved to Rajpur, near her aunt, for a while. They lived in a little mud house and every day Didi would go off collecting fire wood. But her cousins and her little sister went to a school set up for Tibetan children by a Catholic charity. Didi longed to go to it, so one day, instead of going to the forest, she ran to the school and asked to be admitted. By this time, she was thirteen, but they had to put her in Grade 1. She loved it. Each evening she would grab a few sticks on the way home! But suddenly on Day 4 the school door opened and there stood Grandfather! He had become suspicious about the very small bundle of wood she brought home! He was still dead set against schooling for his granddaughter, and tried to arrange a good marriage for her. However, Didi stood her ground, and continued at school. For about 6 months there was a constant battle of wills be-

Continued on page 5

DIDILA'S STORY

Continued

tween Didi and her grandfather, who was still upset. Then he became ill with a stomach complaint and went to stay with his sister in a Tibetan settlement right in the middle of India in Madhya Pradesh, while he received treatment. Now Didi forced the issue by asking at the school if she could be accepted as a boarder, leaving her aunt to look after granny. There were 200 Tibetan children in the school, and Didi stayed there for a year.

Then came her downfall. She made friends with a girl who had a bad reputation, and went with her to a movie. It was a typical Hindu movie, a very romantic love story. When Grandfather heard, he was furious. He thought Didi would be lured into a bad life with all the wrong kind of boys – not at all suitable for a girl of high birth. So he took her off to his sister in Madhya Pradesh. It was incredibly hot, and even worse were the large snakes of which Didi was terrified. But there were compensations. She was able to go to school, and there were lots of teenagers to play with.

One day, a Taiwanese gentleman came to her aunt's house. The government of Chiang Kai Chek had always been helpful to the people of Kham, until the Communist takeover in 1949. Now that the dukes of Kham were in refugee camps in India, the Taiwanese offered them money (did they hope for their help in eventually returning to China as the rightful government?) Those, like Didi's grandfather, who were loyal to the Dalai Lama, would not accept. Taiwan was also offering educational opportunities to Tibetan children, and Didi was keen to go. The Taiwanese man, at least 30 years her senior, fell in love with Didi! She was taken to Calcutta by her uncle to arrange a marriage, but she cried so much, they took pity on her, and dropped the idea.

Then she discovered there would be a long wait in Calcutta for a visa to Taiwan to study, and she would have to live in the Taiwanese man's house. She couldn't bear the thought, but what other option did she have except to go back to granny? So a cousin who was going to New Delhi, suggested that she go with him and see what she could find there. Ever since she had seen the tall, fair-skinned Swiss Red Cross nurses in their white uniforms greeting her family as they stumbled into Nepal, Didi had wanted to be a nurse. So her cousin took her to a foreign agency in New Delhi and they were most helpful. Because she only had the equivalent of Grade 3 English, the agency thought it would be hard for her to continue with a formal education, but they were able to secure a place for her at Holy Family Hospital. Didi was elated. There were 15 Tibetan girls in the class; the language of instruction was Hindi.

She studied for a year, and then went home to visit Granny in the Kumrao Tibetan Settlement, where she had finally been settled. Didi was horrified to find her sick and very poor. Grandfather was still with his sister, getting treatment for his stomach. There were three camps at Kumrao, with a little dispensary in each. There was one Western lady doctor, with a Tibetan doctor-in-training, for the entire set up, and 2 nurses at each dispensary. Didi spent her time following after the Western doctor pleading "Please ma'am, please ma'am, let me work in the dispensary to be near my granny". At the end of her holiday, she went back to her training in the hospital in New Delhi, but eventually a letter came from the TIRS (Tibetan Industrial Rehabilitation Society) stating that she was hired as a dispensary nurse "in the creche at Kumrao", in the camp where granny was. The nurses worked in the dispensary in the mornings and in the creche in the afternoons. She earned 80 rupees a month. Grandfather came back, well,

and the three of them lived in a little tent, and she was able to look after her granny. Eventually houses were built in the camps, the settlement having built the communal buildings first – the dispensaries and schools.

Didi's next adventure was to fall in love with a young Tibetan. By this time, Granny's brothers, both lamas in Nepal, had learned that she was very sick and they came to take her back to Nepal with them, to look after her. Grandfather insisted that Didi go too, but she, newly in love, said no.

A few months later, she and her husband found out about the Canadian Government scheme to send a planeload of refugees to Canada. They applied, and 6 months later were told to come to New Delhi. At that time, English people living in Delhi liked having Tibetan housekeepers, and they got good jobs as housekeepers. They were there, waiting, for two years. Didi had her first baby. Finally, 60 Tibetans were flown to Canada, arriving on March 5, 1972. Many, including Didi and her husband, were taken to Saskatoon and arrived on a sunny, snowy day. For the younger Tibetans from the settlements in South India, this was their first experience of snow and they were excited. Everywhere was so white and so clean! The Department of Manpower and Immigration looked after them – and did it very well indeed. They felt thoroughly welcomed and well looked after. Shelter, food, household items and clothing were provided, and for six months there were people showing them how to live in Canada – how to shop and where, how to make appointments. There was a social worker to help them, and baby-sitting arranged so that they could go to ESL classes. **It was a wonderful introduction to Canada!**

The final instalment of Didi's story will appear soon.

TRANS HIMALAYAN AID SOCIETY

TRAS EXECUTIVE

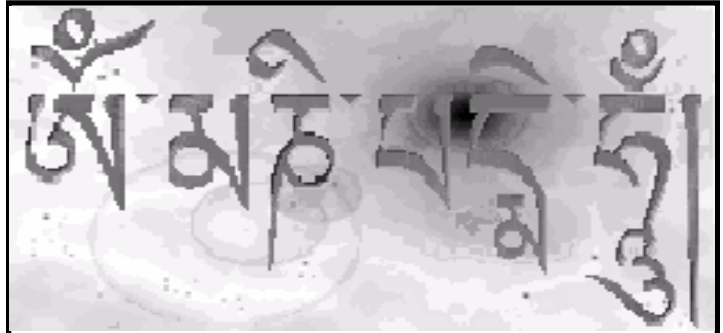
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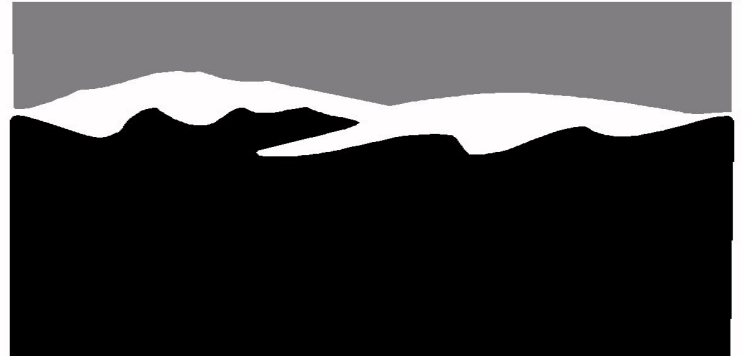
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Om Mani Padme Hum
Hail to the Jewel in the Lotus



Trans-Himalayan Aid Society (TRAS)

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

Possible Additional Donations:

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

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 \$ ____

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