

November 9<sup>th</sup>

I was asleep by 9 pm, very tired from yesterday's bus ride and later activities. I slept for a solid 5 hours and woke twice more during the night but quickly fell back into slumber for the first time in several days. Hopefully this means that I am coming into Nepali time.

I was up at six to begin to coordinate what we would need for the day. I also needed to journal yesterday's events before it got to lost in the flurry of activities that will consume our days in the school visits, family meals with Dhiren and Tuna and other things that will naturally unfold along the way (count on it!).

I went to the dining area for coffee and breakfast with the laptop in hand. I didn't get much done as an Australian couple and their son came in and we chatted about where we had been and where we were headed. Andrea came in later as did Dhiren and Tuna.

We were soon off to a scientific supply house as the school we were visiting; Shree Lower Secondary at Pithuwar had added a 7th grade level and was in need of a basic science lab for teaching. The science teacher had provided a list for us to work with. This would be our third year supporting the school, last year we provided pencils, pens, toothbrushes for each student and then purchased a large assortment of recreation equipment for the children.

When we arrive, the business wasn't open so Dhiren called to let them know we were there. We waited across the street which coincidentally was the Island Jungle resort where he worked. The owners were there within the hour and we spent the next two hours selecting the items and adding educational posters and upgrading some of the other materials. We split the cost between the US and German funds.

By this time we are running behind and the school has been expecting our arrival. We are on motorbikes clutching boxes of supplies, trying to hold on with one hand while being thumped up and down on the pot-holed roads. We are without helmets, my international health insurance is void when on a motorcycle, Dhiren is talking on the cell phone many times during the ride, steering with one hand and he isn't the most adept motorcyclist that I have ridden behind. The ride through the countryside to the school takes almost an hour.

We come upon a crowd stretched across the road with a band in front and women with strings of marigolds and other flowers in hand. There are about 100 people, parents, teachers and the children all there to greet us. It is overwhelming. The band is playing, we are strung with no less than a dozen flowered necklaces, a white Kata (prayer cloth) is presented, and our hands filled by each child presenting us with a flower or petals. The children are smiling and certainly enjoying the festivities.

I will say this many times during our school experiences, this is all for you who have donated and made the little we can do possible. Simply giving this description of this small part of the event doesn't do it justice. I am truly humbled and know that this honor is well beyond anything that I deserve; I pass this on to you, know that what you have done is recognized and appreciated by the schools and the students.

We walk another ¼ mile to the school past houses lining the road and there are more parents and children watching and waving to us. At the school there are tables and chairs waiting, and microphone and sound system. The children and community folks are seated on the ground in front of us while a procession of school officials give speeches which last about an hour. There are also young girls who have been asked to dance the traditional Nepali dances for us and they are fluid and graceful and absolutely charming and beautiful.

Andrea and I have an opportunity to speak to the crowd through an interpreter. I thank them for their incredible hospitality, let them know they honor us too much and the honor goes to the parents who believe in education, the teachers who love their work, and the community that supports them as they can.

As the program comes to an end (it is quite a production), I ask to meet with the three young dancers. I have brought some of the jewelry that several of you have donated and they are absolutely thrilled to each receive a necklace. This school serves a very rural and poor area and for these girls to have a nice piece of jewelry is a thrill. I also spot a young girl about 2 yrs old and she shyly is brought by her mother and is presented with a necklace from Nancy's Charleston women's group. She also quickly retreats to her mom and wants little to do with this stranger! She is adorable and actually smiles for a photograph (at a distance) when encouraged by her mother).

We wrap up with a meeting of the school administrators and teachers. Once again they want to thank us and also to elicit support in adding on additional rooms to their expanding student population. Next year they will be adding 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Of course the funds needed for this type of a project are outside of the finances that I have been able to raise. If I took all of what was donated and put it to this use it would build the rooms but then the other schools we serve would do without. Unfortunately what I tend to encounter is the perception that I either have wealth or have access to it. I'm in that 99% in our country although in the top 5% in the world. On one level I have, the other I don't.

From here we are a short distance to Dhiren's home where we meet his wife, mother and his three children as they return from school. We also have our first Daal Bhat, the traditional Nepali meal consisting of a large mound of rice, daal (lentil soup/sauce poured over the rice), curried mix of potatoes and cauliflower, lightly cooked fresh spinach and a hot sauce to be mixed with the rice also. It is

delicious! This is topped off with a small taste of millet wine (Nepali version of moonshine).

We visit for a couple of hours; the younger two children take us for a walk around the rice and vegetable fields, getting a chance to practice their English with us. I also have brought one of Dave Roger's puzzles to confound and challenge the kids with.

Around 6:30 we head back towards the lodge on the motorbikes, always an adventure in the dark. We ask to stop by the internet café in the small tourist section called "Little Thamel" so we can update our friends. I sent you the 11/7 Journal while Andrea works for close to an hour on her sharing. While waiting for her Dhiren buys us each a Chitwan Jungle Park t-shirt and Tuna gets us small prayer flags. I try to discourage each purchase as what we have been provided in our experiences today would last for quite a while.

From here we are quickly at the lodge meet Bhim, his wife and two French women around the campfire where he is grilling meat for their dinner. It is great to see him again, this year as he did last year, has provided us with a low lodge rate because of our work with the schools.

Andrea goes off to shower and I go with Dhiren and Tuna to the restaurant to meet up with Santosh a teacher and another relative of Dhiren's who is building a business of chicken and eggs. We share a beer, socialize and talk about tomorrow's school and what we will bring for the children. The school is about an hours bike ride and then a half hour walk up the mountain. Everyone at the table is going with us.

After this I head to the room to ready for bed and spend the next almost two hours trying to put together the past two days events into words that won't do justice to all that has come to pass.

"Let it be, Let it be.....there will come an answer, let it be....."

Beatles

Peace

chuck