

Saturday Nov Saturday November 16th

This morning was an early start, up and having breakfast by 7 and on the road by 8. We were going to visit the first of the Women's Literacy and micro-loan projects. Our ride was fairly short but out of the town's limits about five miles to an area called Musekhola. The area is located beside the highway and is considered an illegal settlement as the people do not own the land. They have obviously lived there for quite some time. The first woman we visited, Madhu Maya Nepali was 45 years old and had four family members she was supporting. She had gone thru the literacy training but had forgotten much of it. She had chosen to raise pigs as a source of income and had thus far been provide an initial loan of R 5000 (\$66) and subsequently a R 10,000 loans of which she has repaid. She had a two room adobe home that was neat and clean. She had recently sold on of her pigs and was looking to buy another piglet to raise.

The next woman lived a few houses away and had chosen to raise goats. This was Ram Maya Pulami, 54 years old and supporting a family of four. She had been provided three loans totaling R 25,000 of which she had repaid. She currently had 9 goats. Both women were very appreciative of the Rotary Micro-Credit program and spoke of how it had given them some financial stability.

We then walked up a short set of step to a small school, closed because it was a Saturday Holiday (all days off are called holidays). There was a gathering of women there totaling about 20 who had been involved in the micro-loan program. They each presented us with leis of flowers and also handfuls of small bouquets or individual flowers. So incredibly overwhelming to be honored in such a manner when I have done nothing to have earned it except to be a guest in their culture.

There were a few short speeches by the Rotarians and I had the opportunity to thank them each for sending their children to school and for being the mothers and backbones of their family and culture. The women also shared some of their successes and also expressed an interest in having larger loans to increase their capacity in marketing and income. Unfortunately the micro-loan program has run its course with the matching grant so that will need to be re-addressed, something I am interested in working on.

From there we walked a short ways to a small road-side store and had tea. The owner Kalpana Shrestra was also a recipient of a micro-loan to expand her small business which she ran with her husband and three children. We also met an older woman who was a recipient and had a small wooden cart in which she sold a small sampling of items. Someone had broken into it the night before and she had lost a sizeable amount of supplies. Very heart-braking, she had very little in her life and yet someone would steal from her.

We took a jeep ride back to Damauli, about a 10 minutes ride. These are open, with no doors and seat about 8 comfortably but usually have people hanging from every available hand-hold.

Lunch was next with the local physician, Ram Hari Dahal, trained in the Philippines. We went to his home, met his wife (Kalpana), mother and father, a sister and three nieces/nephews. We had the traditional meal of rice, dahl, spinach, potatoes with cauliflower, and a few raw vegetables. Our desert was a wonderful yogurt (curd) with fresh fruit. We then walked to his small office to see his set-up. His brother runs a pharmacy next door. He stated that you do not need training to open a pharmacy. Dr. Dahal's dream is to open a small hospital, expanding his clinic and staff.

Our next adventure was a 45 minutes ride to the Setiganga Community Hospital which is towards Pokhara., one of our eventual destinations. The hospital has one physician, on call 24 x 7, 10 beds, 15 staff, and serves and an emergency facility, does deliveries, has a small X-Ray machine, and very small lab that does the most basic of testing. We were met by about 8-9 hospital board members, were again presented with leis of flowers and then shared tea and talked about the hospital. They serve a surrounding population of 150,000 (stated as 1 Lak, 50,000). There is a small attached pharmacy. Their only source of income is in donations and the small fees they collect from services. The Rotary club has partnered with another club to purchase a small ambulance for the hospital. Since they are on the main highway they see a lot of accidents and many need transported to the larger facilities in Pokhara. They have also begun the construction of a new hospital which we walked to visit. Very impressive in size and in the quality of construction for the area. They anticipate an opening within the next year.

There was a physician traveling back to Pokhara who was currently in Damauli and had called ahead to ask if we would stay put so he could meet with me. I am honored that people would think so highly of the opportunity to meet with me but I believe they over-estimate my value to them in terms of resources. His name is, Dr. Buddi Bahadur Thapa. He is on staff at the government regional hospital in Pokhara and also volunteers some time to this community hospital. A very nice gentleman and our conversation was brief and to the point about the needs of the hospital and community.

It was getting dark as we began the drive back and it is always such fun to encounter vehicles coming straight at you with their high beams on, in your lane, blaring their horn, while you have no idea what lies ahead of you or behind them as they swerve at the last minute, allowing you a small portion of the road. Life is such a delicate balance here.

Although it was late when we arrived back in Damauli, Dr Dahal took us to the government run hospital to see the conditions. He spoke to the woman in charge and we just walked in and saw it all, including patients in the wards. It was a very depressing and dirty place. It is surprising that anyone with any level of medical/nursing training would not be concerned about basic cleanliness and its relationship to infection, etc. This was also true at the community hospital and Dr. Dahal stated that it was a matter of illiteracy and lack of proper training.

We had reached the end of another day or so we thought. We ended up at the hotel with the physician and another Rotarian. They ordered some vegetable dumplings for us that were very filling, there being about 12 on each plate. After a while we stated that we

were headed to bed and there was surprised look from everyone. There was still dinner to be served and eaten at another hotel across town! I tried to decline for us but it seems that there would be offense taken if we didn't go. So off we went. The hotel was owned by an older unmarried woman from the Mustang region of Nepal, a northern, remote Buddhist area. She also kept poor rural students who worked for her when they were not in school for room and board. She was a smiling but apparently very dominant woman who ran a tight business. We did manage to eat a little but not much. The main thing is the Rotarian who brought us there had his wife and son meet us there also so it had a purpose. His son, 31 years old, married and a teacher was very interested in speaking with English speaking people to practice his own use of the language. They were nice folks and it was kind of them to arrange dinner.

Now...it was finally time for an end to this day. We were all very tired but had experienced another wonderful day with new friends.