

Sunday November 16th

We were beginning another day early. Our visit this morning was to the village of Chhabdi where many women were a part of the literacy and micro-loan projects. Chhabdi is also a very famous religious site in Nepal. There is a temple there that is built around a small mountain stream that is home to large schools of a carp like fish, some as long as two feet. It is surprising to see so many fish in such a small area. This is one of the reasons it is deemed to be a spiritual place, its seemingly impossible probability to have these fish come from nowhere. We removed our shoes as we entered the temple and as I walked into another small part of the stream with fish, there was a headless baby goat floating in the water, the blood flowing eerily across the water from the space where his head would have been, as a sacrifice to the gods. Very surreal.

As we walked further out from the temple there is a small waterfall, about 100 feet total, dropping in several levels to feed the small pools of water the fish lie in. There are said to be fish as long as 4-5 feet in the pools. We saw a head of a fish protruding from under rocks and were told that this was one of the larger fish, resting in a long hole. After we left the temple there were two holy men, one dressed in orange robes providing blessings to people. We gain were blessed and marked as we left a small donation for their needs.

Chhabdi draws a lot of people from the surrounding area because of its religious significance. This is the basis of the women's micro-loan project there. They have been provided finances to purchase small religious artifacts to sell to those visiting. There were probably 15 women involved, each with individual stalls or small stores, all pretty much selling the same thing. We were told that there were as many as 5000 people that might visit on a holiday. Now this is was the hell up a holler. The road is very bad and long. There are several paths that come thru the mountains leading to the temple, so many do walk.

We next met with the women behind one of the stores and they each presented us with flowers and a Namaste in greeting. We all introduced ourselves and then the women shared some of their stories with us and especially about tier future needs. They were curious why Rotary couldn't help them with repairing the road, why Rotary couldn't help them establish a small clinic as there was no health care available except in Damauli. They were very open and assertive...yea! Empower anyone and they will rise! It is very encouraging to see the opportunity provided to these women in assisting them to be independent and financially stable to some degree.

We headed back to town for lunch and recoup some energy for the afternoon. We actually had about 2 1/2 hours to have for ourselves. Kara made some calls and Nafeeza went to finish buying saris.

One of the things that I have held back from the writing is about Nafeeza. Her father had asked me earlier this year about her coming along. I had met with her several times to go over the purpose of the trip and that she would be actively involved in all aspect so the service projects, etc. There were some early clues that I should have picked up on but let

them go as anxiousness in having never traveled on such a trip. We hadn't been in Purulia three days when I sat her down with the hospital manager about her attitude and behavior. While Nafeeza is a 21 year old college graduate she is also westernized girl of Indian descent that is spoiled and full of herself. Those were the words I used as a part of my talk with her. She was embarrassing me with her behavior and the hospital staff was not pleased either. Her version of India is seen thru Bollywood films. She didn't want to engage with the local people. There have been several other times since then when I have had to reign her in because she continues to seek attention from others and not be actively engaged. She has improved some but is more of a detriment than a benefit.

This will sound like favoritism but honestly it is not. I have been very proud of Kara and the way she is actively engaged, curious, and interacts with everyone. When asked to speak at any of the small gatherings at schools or in communities she is gracious, thankful and provides a perspective that indicates she is interested in all aspects of the culture and projects. There are 5 years of age and maturity difference in the two women and a huge difference in their understanding of the world around them.

Ok, sorry for the tirade, back to the day. In the afternoon we walked across the river with Rotarians Ramnath Bhattarai, a local dentist and Santosh the owner of the hotel. Santosh has donated a lot of his time to hosting us not only in the hotel but during the day as well with our activities.

We stopped at a small rural school and of course all of the kids went wild when we said Namaste or hello. It is such fun disrupting the schools, the kids love it. We sat in a class while the teacher led the students thru part of the CLE process for us. They were all anxious to volunteer and did well in translating. We also met with the teachers and asked about their concerns. One of them was that the CLE is something additional they have taken on in addition to their traditional Nepali curriculum. They would like some form of compensation for that, not an unreasonable request.

We visited an area of the Bote people, traditionally fishers and river dwellers. The micro-loan project had provided them with additional opportunities to move into vegetable farming. We met with three men who were growing tomatoes under a large open greenhouse. One of the things that I noticed was that several homes had outhouses and one had a methane generator, using the cow manure to produce the gas and then use it for cooking. Other NGO have been here before with their various projects. Outside of Africa, Nepal is the poorest country in the world. No matter what is done here at times it seems so little in the scheme of things but we know that touching one life is all you need to do.

As we were walking back down the hill, we stopped to visit a Krishna Gurung, a man probably in his mid sixties. He had a good portion of land, wealthy by the local standards. He was growing bamboo, an specially precious and profitable redwood, ginseng, ginkgo balboa, sevia (sweetener), and many other medicinal plants used in Ayer Vedic medicine. He showed us his small literature library on medicinal plants and some of the dried herbs. Over tea he stated that he had cured himself of diabetes over the course of a year with specific treatments. There are many unknowns in life and mysteries that come into being.

Who is to question and from what perspective? Anyway, Krishna asked if I could get him some ginseng seed for West Virginia, and I agreed to research that possibility.

We next walked back to town and had a moment with the dentist's wife and four year old daughter. Both were very pretty and shy.

We ended up at the hotel with Dr. Dahal appearing again. He ordered a meat dumpling for Kara and Nafeeza which neither really liked. Santosh varied his menu for us this evening and fixed vegetable fried rice and noodles. One of the Rotarians with us called his 11 year old daughter and then put Kara on the phone with her. They apparently did well in communicating as I heard a lot of laughter.

So with full bellies, we had ended another day. Tomorrow we would have a day to ourselves (that's why you are getting these journals) while several of the Rotarians travel to Kathmandu to visit with the RI President D. K. Lee, making his first ever visit to Nepal and this newly created District 3292.

We hope you are all well. Know that we miss you but hey, we're in Nepal!

Peace