

Monday, November 16<sup>th</sup>

It has been three long and exciting days packed full of activities, meeting a wide spectrum of individuals from the surrounding communities. We have learned a lot in a short period of time about the people, the area and the culture. There have been so many little defining moments, a child's smile, the women's shyness, or the pride an individual takes in talking about their work. Hopefully some of that will come across as I try and recall the past days.

On Friday we began the day pretty easy, having breakfast around 9 and the first activity scheduled for 10. We hopped in a vehicle for a ride to the Siddheswori Lower secondary School, located in a rural area about 1 /2 hour drive. One of the Rotarians with us, Arjun Laudari is a teacher here. The school is located next to the Madi Seti River which runs thru Dumauli, a beautiful setting with no other structures around, the mountains as its backdrop. We were there to see in action the Concentrated Language Encounter (CLE) program instituted by Rotary in certain rural schools and in the Women's Literacy project. The program was developed in Australia and used with the Aboriginal community. The process begins with a meaningful sentence (before any of the language is known) and then uses picture interaction, review and role play, writing the story, making a big book (story book) and then participating in the language activities. In this process they learn to listen, speak, think, communicate, act and work cooperatively and creatively together.

We observed the process in action and saw what the children had done so far. These children are all from poor rural families where the use of English is non-existent. They will be the first in their families to be bi-lingual. I can see that wherever we go in the school we will cause disruption. The fact that we are Caucasian in the back hill of Nepal makes it so. The children are so incredibly beautiful, innocent, and full of smiles, eager to interact, and leave me feeling so energized. If we could find a method in which we harnessed that innocence and happiness at this age our world would be a Shangri-La.

Rotary President Hari Gurung also shared one of the class letters from Cheat Lake Elementary School with a class and they spent the next half hour composing a letter back and I took a class photo to go with it. Cheat Lake had sent about 10 class letters (w/ class photos) to begin an exchange program. The students here were excited to be involved and share back. Another class provided their written and drawn work from the morning to be exchanged.

We visited two other schools once we were back in Damauli. They were also very small and were involved in the CLE training method. Once again we had fun with the children, they love seeing their photos on the digital screen.

Our next stop was to come back into town and walk to the Vyas Cave, also located by the Medi Seti River. This cave was once the home of a locally famous spiritual teacher. It has been made into a small park with temple and a current orange robed resident teacher. He honored us each with a blessing and the traditional red Hindu mark on the forehead. It

was interesting that each time I photographed the teacher, he assumed a meditative pose. I think he gets a lot of people taking pictures.

We also walked top the river and saw the burning ghats used to cremate bodies of the dead. Earlier in the walk we had witnessed from a distance a cremation in process with family and friends gathered at the riverbank while the flames of the funeral pyre consumed the earthly remains. The ashes would later be spread onto the river and return to their natural elements.

To cross the river, a very long swinging bridge had been constructed about 12 years ago. It is a cable suspension, all metal and very stable. It is hard to gauge its lengths but it took us about 10 minutes to walk across. It was a cool way to look at the river, In the middle you can see the Seti River running from the West and flowing into and forming the Medi Seti river. As I mentioned before the water is clear and glacial green and yet the riverbanks were filled with children swimming, clothes washing and bathing. It looked inviting and we hope to take a dip before we go.

The day wound down with a formal Rotary meeting beginning at 5:30. I had brought, just for this occasion one pair of black jeans and a blue button down shirt, the best it gets for me. To highlight the dandy appearance, my jewelry accessories were the Rotary Wheel pin and our district pin in the shape of WV.

The meeting was formal but relaxed. President Gurung began with an international prayer for peace. This reminded me of Gary Epling our club treasurer who always is inclusive in his prayers for everyone regardless of religion, race or place. The president's wife Shassi, presented each of us with a prayer scarf and flowers.

We were provided an overview of the area and the club's activities thru two short power point presentations which will be given to me prior to my leaving to share with you at home. We also exchanged club flags, a Rotary tradition which each club displays as a reminder of their partnerships and friendships made along the way. I had five pins from the WV Secretary of State which I presented to the club officers and we gave each member and their spouses (called Annes) a small WV pin that gave our state motto of Wild and Wonderful.

A small appetizer that we miss-took for diner was provided before the meeting ended. It was more than enough for us and we layer had to beg off of dinner. It had been a good day with many people arranging their lives to accommodate us. I always wonder whether we can step to the challenge in our own way in hosting should they choose to visit. So, another day of being blessed with new friends and experiences. Peace to you.