



SHREE MANGAL DVIP Boarding School



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Dear Friends of Shree Mangal Dvip School

SMD finished the last school year on April 17. The new school year started on April 21, so the children had only a very short break. My apologies for not getting an end-of-the year newsletter out.

All you sponsors will be receiving a report on your student's progress for the last school year (2002-2003)...something new. Later this month we will be send a new photo and information about each student. Later in the year, the children will send letters. You are welcome to write to the children c/o of SMD. Postcards always make it through the Nepali postal system.

What We've Been Up To Over The Past Few Months...

Final Exams

Results Day was April 17. Vice Principal Mr. Simon Lama reports that the pass percentage is steadily climbing. At the end of

First Term: 65.97% passed

Second Term: 72.97% passed

Third Term: 84.76% passed

Simon reckons that we will continue to see overall academic improvement in this new year.

Results for Class 10 students, who must write national SLC (school leaving certificate) board exams are not in yet.

We expect the government to post results sometime in June.



Teachers

Milan is serving as Head Teacher, assistant to the Vice Principal.

Jhabindra has taken on the task of monitoring school discipline. Both are putting their hearts into their work, making improvements in all areas of SMD. Another teacher, Thinley Singye has written a text book for teaching Tibetan language.

Cleaning Up the Neighbourhood

Open sewage ditches on the road outside the school compound flood every time we have heavy rain. The pump we had installed last year can't keep up with the volume of water. In monsoon this presents a serious health problem because our grounds lie below the roadbed. In ten minutes' of hard rain, we have a lake of filthy water a foot deep. We pump the filth out to the ditches and sewer lines on the road. Downstream from us everyone is inundated.

For the past year, kids and staff have been cleaning out the clogged ditches that run along the road outside the school walls. This drew a lot of comment, even objections from neighbours. (Some thought we should have low caste people do the cleaning).

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Cleaning Up the Neighbourhood continued..

On deeper investigation, we discovered the problem: underground sewer lines have collapsed. The city doesn't maintain them so we approached our neighbours with a proposition: let's work together to clean up the mess, sharing labour and costs. Everyone decided to join in. I think this helping spirit arose amongst our neighbours because SMD had set an example in the community.

Losar

We had a short Tibetan new year holiday this past March; lots of song and dance, games and delicious treats (like "kapse", which is a Losar deep-fried sweet...sort of like a crispy donut).



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Wonderful Friends and Helpers

We are continually blessed by compassionate, energetic and hardy friends from around the world; some volunteer here in Nepal, some work for us in their home countries.

In early winter, a couple of Australian volunteers, Wendy Moore and Nicki Haismans joined us. (photo to right) Using my office as an activity room, they spread cheer throughout the school. The children loved them and teachers in our primary section were able to learn some new techniques. When it came time for W and N to leave, there was a suspiciously Aussie edge to the little kids' English.



Mid-winter, other volunteers joined us: Mike Woodward from Calgary and Chamila Sten from Denmark and Hope Roth from the US. (see photos) All wonderful, open-hearted souls, they were adopted into the SMD family right away. Mike gave me a succinct fundraising motto: "Great school...send money"! Hope was in Kathmandu for a studies abroad programme, but she managed to find the time to come and teach our little ones some songs...their repertoire expanded greatly because of Hope's work. When she left, Hope donated her guitar.



Mike Woodward



Hope Roth with teacher Palzom and some LKG students

Chamila is on her way to volunteer in Africa on an AIDS/HIV project after leaving us. Here are some of her reflections on volunteering at SMD. (Here are some excerpts from Chamila's report)

"...Despite the fact that I had had no experience in teaching before, I somehow managed. One of the reasons that I did manage was because of the children. I was scared to death that they would be difficult to control like any other Danish school class probably would be, but instead I found a group of children completely dedicated to the idea of learning and being good students. Sometimes I even had to "push" them in order to get them to utter something. But as time passed and we all got to know each other better they started to lose their shyness and we had a great time together.

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Wonderful Friends and Helpers- Chamila ...continued

...After the ordinary classes I played soccer with the girls from the school. Among the "normal" girls were also nuns. Its great that they wanted to play and especially that they did not care about the fact that all the boys would stand there and look at them. I had the job of being their coach and teacher, but I quickly realized that main thing that these girls really wanted to do was just to play not to learn any difficult tactics or impossible combinations. Once I had attended a sports college, so of course I tried hard to be strict and really insist that we would at least warm up. So most of the time I just supervised them and was the referee. Another important job was to chase the boys off the court so that the girls could have their one hour, twice a week, all by themselves.

A city like Katmandu is at the same time beautiful and horrible. It has to be said that the air pollution in the inner city of Katmandu is so high that not even the World Health Organization would want to measure it and surely if you stay there for more that a decade you are likely to fetch one of the many different types of cancer. But the place where the school is a bit outside the inner city and does not suffer as much as the inner city from the air pollution.

I have been thinking a lot about what exactly to say about my stay in Nepal. In my case I have very little negative to say. It is obvious that Nepal of course is different from the west.... There are dangers in Nepal like anywhere else, but the best thing you can do, is just not to be scared and never to lose your mind.

But one thing is for sure. If you go to Nepal, alone as I did or together with someone, you must be able to take care of yourself. You have to be independent and creative and able to set up different programs, educational as well as leisure-wise. You have to show cultural sensitivity and mostly you have to really want to do the thing you do and have your heart and mind there.

I think that one of the most difficult things about living in Nepal is to see people and especially children living in absolute poverty. You can not help feeling sad and often there is nothing you can do in the long term. The only thing you can do is to get yourself involved in one of these projects around the world that do aim to make a difference and if you do have the chance don't hesitate.

At the end of the day, (a volunteer's) reward does not lie within a pay check or you being satisfied about yourself and proud that you did something, but instead it is seeing, in my case, the children developing individually and being more and more aware of themselves and able to help themselves that makes it all worthwhile. You do so little and get even more back. And I can do nothing but recommend it. "

Chamila Sten

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Himalayan Dental Relief

Like the Capistrano swallows, the [Himalayan Dental Relief](#) volunteers are back this spring. Headed by Laurie Mathews, HDR has found a 'home base' in our school. (Husband Andrew Holecek is in retreat at Gampo Abbey). HDR's mandate is to improve the dental health of Himalayan people. Over the past few years, they've focussed on all the people under Thrangu Rinpoche's care: students, teachers, support staff, monks and nuns, large and small. HDR does dental camps in the mountains for those who cannot get down to the Kathmandu valley. (see last newsletter). This year, hygienist Mary ('Speedo') Anderson, and dentist Tom Grams are back. This year, Mary checked and cleaned the teeth of all the children in our school, she even worked with a case of "Boudha belly". Mary brought her engineer husband Bill this year. He went set to work teaching English to some of our staff.

Working along with HDR is Kim Balazs, Director of [Global Humanitarian Expeditions](#). Kim organises the trips for volunteers, mixing one part volunteerism with one part trekking. This spring, Dr. Don and Joy Lippincott, Dr. Bob Zill, Terry Gimbel, Holly Patik and Loie Lennon did a dental camp for five and a half days. Over 400 children had their teeth tended to. In her other life, Terry is a park ranger in Colorado. She spent one of the strike shutdown days teaching our kids about moose. Last year, HDR donated over \$80,000 of dentistry to Thrangu Rinpoche's people.



SMD decided to share our good fortune with 5 valley orphanages and with Pullahari Monastery (Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche's) this year. Of course our routine gets a little discombobulated by having people coming and going, but we figure it's worth it. For one thing, it generates local goodwill. There has been tension in Nepal between those perceived as "Tibetan" (as we are) and "Nepalis". Another spinoff for us is that our older kids who volunteer as assistants to the dentists (Raju B194, Pema Norbu B161, Tsewang Bhuti B154) get to polish their colloquial English and their social skills.

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VVIPs From VVF

While SMD was celebrating Losar, Thrangu Rinpoche was at his monastery in Sarnath India to teach the annual seminar for foreign students. John Fox and Martin Evans had both flown in from Vancouver to attend, but took a weekend to fly to Kathmandu, even though they were both under the weather.



As director of Thrangu Rinpoche's non-profit in Canada, John wanted to have a look at all of Rinpoche's projects here in Nepal: SMD school, Namu Buddha retreat centre, the Branch School for Small Monks (also at Namu Buddha), the nunnery, Tara Abbey, the monastery, Thrangu Tashi Choling, and the retreat centre undergoing construction across the valley in Bhaktapur.

John and Martin stayed were hosted at SMD and were able to take part in some of the Losar celebrations when they weren't careening around the valley to see all of the projects. They came back to Sarnath tired but happy, with a good feeling of what Rinpoche's projects are all about.

Engineers Without Borders

Nepal is at high risk for earthquakes. Substandard construction materials/standards, plus the fact that the Kathmandu valley is an ancient lakebed magnify the risk. (As it is taught, Manjushri drained the lake when he cut the Chhobar gorge with his sword.)

A group of engineers in Edmonton, headed up by Andrew Mitchell, along with Dean Mullin and Matt Wacowich at the U of Alberta (now volunteering in Guatemala) are working on plans for retrofitting the old block, which houses the dorms. They are also fundraising for the project. If you would like to donate, you can donate through one of our non-profits in Canada, Germany, the UK or the US. Please write Shirley himalayanchildren@yahoo.co.uk for more information.

Annual Prayer Festival

After Losar every year, Rinpoche leads the annual Mani droubchen in the assembly hall of the school. All the monks and nuns participate, some coming from Rinpoche's dharma centres overseas although this year, fewer returned probably because of political tension in Nepal and the war in Iraq. Millions of Om Mani Padme Hungs are recited. A daily tally is kept outside the door. This year we noticed the tally was a little low. So what happened? The older kids spent a whole day racking up mantras for the benefit of all sentient beings...

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Humanitarian Crisis in Nepal = Overcrowding in SMD

Over the past seven years of civil war, mountain villagers found themselves trapped by the fighting or by food/medicine blockades imposed by the government. Unable to farm or herd, villagers were accused of complicity and victimised by government and rebel forces.

This precipitated a humanitarian crisis that had an enormous impact on the school: from 2000 onwards, we were forced to admit children on the basis of life or death. We took only those we feared could not survive another year. We took many more than we normally would have, in a desperate effort to save as many lives as we could.

SMD school population increased almost 600%. We had to ask boarding students whose families live in Boudha to help us to free up beds by having their children sleep at home. Most everyone was happy to help, knowing they were saving lives but the school became extremely crowded.

The Empire Expands

In an effort to relieve cramped classrooms, Rinpoche opened the Branch School for Little Monks (taking 87 small monks out of our classrooms) up at Namu Buddha, the retreat centre, which is about 2 to 4 hours' away from here, depending on road conditions.

And finally, light appeared at the end of the tunnel. In December, following rumours of a house coming vacant across the street, we tracked down the landlady and asked if she'd rent to us. We proposed taking over the first 3 floors (4 rooms plus bathroom on each floor) as living space for our support staff (ground floor) and the small children and "aunties" on the other floors.

She agreed to rent to us, but there was a lot of work needed mostly repairs and enhanced safety features. This being Nepal, it was finally ready in April. The little kids are proud of their new digs and the support staff is over the moon. And the big kids (back in the old dorm) finally have peace and quiet to study and do homework.

Kids' Corner



Tsering Youden 15 years
We asked Tsering Youden B344 Class 5, "If you heard someone saying something unkind about you, how will you feel? What will you do?" Here's what she said.
"If someone says something unkind about me then I will ask him or her to explain. If it's true, then I will change it in a

good way"



Pasang Sherpa 11 years
We asked Pasang, "What are the biggest differences between life at SMD and life in your village?" Pasang comes from Solu Khumbu, the Everest region. He told us, "My village is two days' trek from Kathmandu. The life in my village is very hard and difficult. Most of the people are uneducated. We don't get proper food and shelter in

my village. We don't get a chance to play in my village.

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Unsolicited Comments About SMD Kids

SMD twins with a number of other organizations here in Nepal. One such organization was Nara University Study Abroad Program. Here are some comments from Clarke Warren, the Director:

" Naropa University Study Abroad Program, after eighteen years in Nepal, recently moved its base of operations to Sikh. We had decided to contribute what possessions of NU Nepal were impractical to move to Sikh to Shree Mangal Dvip School.

These things we were giving included wicker wardrobes, some chairs and tables, lamps, miscellaneous other things. I was expecting the school pick-up truck and a few professional coolies to show up on the morning we were to hand the things over. Instead, the school warden, Ms. Tenzin Choyang, and around 25 eight-to-twelve year old students showed up!

At first I was skeptical. How would these youngsters tackle pulling big dusty things out of the mire of the basement in which they had been stored? Choyang simply said, "Don't worry!" Within minutes, the giggling, enthusiastic students were pouring over the things we pointed out, like a highly disciplined hive of engineer ants! They worked together flawlessly, appraising weight, shape, clearance, and carried the things out with ballet-like precision and coordination.

Within the hour, everything was arranged neatly out near the gate, ready to be carried the additional block to the school. They were so grateful! These were the children from, remote homes too far for them to trek to during the holiday, or else orphans who had no home to return to. What some children might consider burdensome labor was a joyful excursion!

At the end, there they all stood, in front of their day's labor, smiling like a constellation of suns. Two had rusty old metal boxes in hand, treasure chests without need to contain any further treasure. One proudly held the jump rope we had relinquished. After a few moments, Choyang presented me with a khata and three books by Thrangu Ripoche in thanks, then the hive again burst into activity, as the acquisitions drifted off down the road on a wave of young enthusiasm. Their presence, utterly unhesitating dedication to the work at hand, cooperative spirit, and contagious joy were the real gift to us.

Shree Mangal Dvip is a wonderful place, and the sheer joy, which the students left us feeling, was proof of the school's amazing vitality. If education around the world could follow what is happening there, the world would be a much less-troubled place. Traditional Tibetan and Buddhist subject matter is presented together with modern education. Every child was so grateful to be alive, and to be studying there. In the midst of these all too grave days, I felt a strong surge of genuine hope for Nepal."

Clarke Warren
Director, Naropa University Study Abroad Program, Sikkim





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Peace Talks On

In October 2002, King Gyanendra dismissed parliament and installed a caretaker government. The new government is seen as powerless but more or less free of corruption. Polls have shown that most Nepalis see casteism and corruption as the root cause of Nepal's troubles, faults they attribute directly to the mainstream political parties, which have used the years of "democracy" since 1991 to drive the country into chaos while they lined their own pockets.

The king put teeth into the government agency that had been established years ago (but rendered impotent by politicians) to clean up corruption. He then began palace-rebel negotiations, which resulted in a ceasefire called on January 29, 2002.

From the outset, the mainstream political parties refused to participate in the talks. However, the palace and the rebels hammered out a code of conduct and started bilateral talks at the end of April.

The political parties are retaliating by trying to derail the talks (using their student organisations) with national strikes, riots, torching buildings, vehicles, etc. Four students have been killed in the past two weeks. In the same span of time, SMD has lost days of instruction because of the unrest.

The nation has lost patience with the mainstream parties: they are driving Nepal back to civil war. It is generally thought that they are afraid what will come out in the corruption report...they will all be facing jail sentences if the report is released and action taken.

As far as peace goes, it now looks like the only hope lies with the king and the rebels. As I type this, a 3-wheeled tempo with loudspeakers is going past my house exhorting everyone to come to a peace rally this weekend. The speaker is saying, "We are all tired of the killing. We want peace"...

Circular Aid: Remarks From Sponsor Lori Goldman

"I am a sponsor of a lovely boy at Shree Mangal Dvip Boarding School in Kathmandu, Nepal. His name is Jigme Gyaltzen and he comes from a far away area in Nepal called Nubri, up near the Tibetan border, six days by foot and one day by bus to the city. I've seen Jigme Gyaltzen twice, once 2 ½ years ago when he had been at the school for only a couple of months and once this past April. The difference in his health, well being, educational level and happiness was remarkable. I was so pleased to see him thriving at the school surrounded by caring fellow students, staff and teachers.

The school is marvelous. Way better than the last time I was here 2 1/2 years ago. It has a large playground for the young kids with great climbing equipment, another huge space for soccer, a ping-pong table, basketball court and volleyball court. It has a new 3-storey building with large administrative offices, better classrooms with desks !!! and large windows, a large better-stocked library and a science lab. The dormitories are cramped, but they are freshly painted, bright and clean, and the little children (maybe 60 or more) are now housed in a large rented house across the street so the older students can have quiet to study.

The playground was well-maintained and large enough to accommodate tens of children. The classrooms are brighter than before spruced up with fresh paint and bigger windows, and some rooms have newer slanted wooden desks for two students, which is far better than the small tables they had before. The computer lab with twelve computers has carpet on the floor and all students go in shoeless to keep it as clean as possible. The library has lots of books but has space for many more - the science section is very sparse and needs more donations.



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Circular Aid: Remarks From Sponsor Lori Goldman..continued

The new kitchen equipment is stainless steel with a huge boiler for steaming all the bread, soup, rice, etc. Much better than wood-fired concrete ovens. The food is much improved as well. Meals are dhal bhaat (rice with curried lentils and vegetables). Children can have seconds and thirds, and to their great delight, they are getting fruit every day now. Everyone looked healthy and bright-eyed.

To help me keep Jigme Gyaltzen in his great school, I go to Nepal every two years or so and buy silver jewellery, Buddhist artefacts, singing bowls, pashmina scarves and stoles, and paper products, all hand-made in Nepal. I bring them home and sell them at Christmas fairs, to friends, and at garage sales. The money goes in a large circle, helping the Nepalis twice: the first time when I buy the goods and the second time when it goes back to my son. I feel honoured that I can be of service in such a small but significant way"

Shirley Visiting N. America

Once again, KC Armour is sharing her frequent flier miles with me. This year I will be searching for opportunities for our kids to study overseas. Here's an excerpt of a press release explaining why...

Help Our Students to Study Abroad

Nepal is teetering on the brink of becoming a failed state; the scant infrastructure that existed outside the Kathmandu valley before the war has been destroyed in the conflict. Few airstrips are operating. Two thirds of the roads and bridges have to be rebuilt. Without transportation, manufacturing, trade and agriculture have come to a standstill. Prices have ballooned. Tourism, for years a dependable source of hard currency, has died. Last year's monsoon added to the misery, destroying crops and killing hundreds in floods and landslides. The impact of these misfortunes on Himalayan people has been catastrophic.

For our students, there is little chance of continuing education after Class 10. They must complete Classes 11 and 12 before going on, but Classes 11 and 12 are a paying proposition in Nepal, as such they are the preserve of the elite. This results in a glass ceiling, sanctioned by the customs and beliefs of orthodox Hinduism, the state religion.



Study Abroad

Some graduates of SMD we've kept with us: L to R: Kiran Lama, just going into Class 12, Zamling Sherpa, just going into Class 12, Pema Norbu, just going into Class 11, Tsewang Bhuti, going to Grade 11 in the US (we hope) and Dolma (Dulal) Sherpa, going to Grades 11 and 12 in Canada (we hope)

For the past three years, we have kept some outstanding students with us to enable them to continue with 11 and 12. They attend "plus two" schools as day students and return to us in the afternoons. SMD assumes all their costs and pays them a monthly wage for their help as tutors to the younger children. Two are in the process of getting scholarships to study overseas. Their sponsors are offering home stays; Dolma Sherpa has been invited to finish Grades 11 and 12 at the Shambhala School in Halifax, Nova Scotia and Tsewang has a chance at a scholarship at a school in the US. Both girls plan to return to their villages when they finish. Both have seen too many people die as a result of illiteracy and ignorance. Tsewang wants to be a doctor. Dolma wants to teach. Neither has much chance of finishing her education inside Nepal.

Experts say it will be 7 to 15 years before the country is functioning normally. If the peace talks fail, it will be much longer; the only hope our young people have of finishing their education is to do so abroad. If you can help in any way, please write Shirley at: himalayanchildren@yahoo.co.uk

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