

PARTNER PLAN

Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal February 2014

c/o United Mission to Nepal
PO Box 126
Kathmandu
Nepal

Dear Friends

We begin our letter with some snapshots of daily life in Kathmandu to try to help you visualise some of the people and situations here that have become so familiar to us over these past two years.



Rubbish collection in Kathmandu

Cati writes: As I sat down to write this letter two Nepali men blew their whistles to announce their arrival in our street for rubbish collection. Here in Kathmandu this entails a bicycle to which is attached a large wooden crate, filled to overflowing with the contents of people's buckets! Anything potentially recyclable is methodically transferred into sacks and plastic bags tied around the edge, entailing prolonged messy sorting with their hands. Despite the unpleasantness of this daily grind, these men chatted cheerfully to me with no suggestion that the tasks of their day were unenjoyable. Instead they demonstrated quiet dignity in doing something worthwhile. An inspiring and humbling start to the day.

Malcolm writes: The other morning as we cycled off to work I realised I had a puncture. Kathmandu is studded with bicycle-repair shops, so while Cati

headed on to the office, I pushed my bike to the nearest one. The friendly and courteous man there expertly stripped out my inner tube, found the offending nail, patched the puncture, reinserted the inner tube, and blew it up. What would have been a laborious and frustrating task for me took him about ten minutes. He then charged me 20 Nepali rupees, - about 13 pence. I cycled on to work thinking how good it feels to be in Nepal at times like this!

Cati writes: During any typical day 'cyclists' come into our street, each doing a specific task: selling fruit and vegetables from huge metal baskets laden with produce, and weighed out on scales hanging from the handle bars; delivering gas cylinders to homes and businesses in exchange for an empty cylinder; collecting old newspapers or cardboard, in return for which they receive some small commission at the end of the day. There seems to be no end to the imaginative ways in which this ubiquitous vehicle can be used. The most alarming example that I've seen recently was a complete three piece suite loaded onto the back of a tricycle, the rider calmly manoeuvring his way across a busy road unconcerned by fast traffic passing in both directions. All in a day's work!

Malcolm writes: Opposite my bicycle-repair shop is the barber I patronise. He is a man of few words, but he seems glad to see me re-appear. Sometimes the television in his shop is on and tuned to the current cricket test match. (Nepalis are very keen on cricket). The barber cuts my hair in silence pausing only to step outside from time to time to spit into the street. (Nepalis are great spitters – but I am sure they think it is a far pleasanter habit than our Western one of solemnly wrapping up our nasal



A daily sight en route to UMN

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gunk to keep in our pockets). He ends the haircut with the traditional head 'massage' – pummelling my head with gentle fisticuffs and great cracking of knuckles. The set price for all this is 65 Nepali rupees – about 43 pence. (I am sure the barbers who work squatting on the pavements – pictured in one of Cati's accompanying photos - charge far less!)



No shortage of work for this tailor on a cold winter's morning

Cati writes: On our own daily cycle ride into work, we invariably pass several men sitting with their treadle sewing machines on the roadside much like musicians playing on pavements in the UK to earn some money. In fact these tailors clearly have an established business, always on exactly the same stretch of road, and never without some piece of clothing either being made or repaired. During these winter months I have felt conscious of how desperately cold they must feel under their layers of clothing, yet they seem to remain remarkably cheerful, regularly surrounded by would-be clients. Last week one of the tailors was sitting in a welcome circle of early-morning sunshine, smiling, hard at work and clearly earning a steady, if small, income throughout the day. How they must long for warmer weather at this time of year!

Cati continues: With regard to our own work here one of our responsibilities in giving pastoral care and support includes welcoming new arrivals who are joining the UMN staff to work in different parts of Nepal. Preparations for leaving home have dominated their lives for some considerable time already before they come to Kathmandu. Nevertheless, being confronted with so many changes from the moment they arrive can entail a huge amount of adjustment and re-orientation. We try whenever possible to meet



Early morning shave becomes a public spectacle!

individuals or families from the moment they arrive in the chaos of Kathmandu airport, and bring them back to wherever they are going to be living for the immediate future. We buy basic supplies of food in advance for their first 24 hours. Some of the essentials we help them with during their early days include giving advice about food and water safety, explaining the daily power cuts or 'load-shedding' schedules in Kathmandu, helping them buy a Nepali SIM card for their mobiles, setting up a bank account in UMN, and finding their way around local shops, churches, schools etc.



cardboard recycling in Kathmandu

We introduce them to the UMN offices and the language teachers whose classes will form a central part of each day for up to five months. During that time we see them often to answer questions and try to deal with any difficulties they may be having: accommodation; childcare; electricity back up through an inverter system; sickness, and the feelings of loneliness or frustration in a strange culture far from home.

These initial contacts have been a great way in which to get to know new UMN staff and we feel both the privilege as well as the responsibility of trying to play a small part in each person's unique adjustment to life in Nepal. Pastoral care necessarily requires a strong degree of trust before anyone is likely to feel able to share any struggles they may be having. Hopefully our being personally involved from the day they arrive can help newcomers develop this trust, and show our potential usefulness to anyone needing someone to turn to.

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Three-piece suite on a tricycle being manouvered across a busy road

Nothing can be done effectively in our own strength however and these past two years have taught us just how much we have to rely on God for wisdom and understanding

Malcolm writes: Sadly there is very little progress to report on political developments since the General Election on 19 November. Unbelievably it has taken almost three months for the new government to be formed. The new Prime Minister lives a spartan lifestyle, and is widely regarded as having resisted the corruption which so many politicians fall for. This of course is great news, but at the same time he is aged 75, and very sadly suffering from throat cancer. He has already

said that he will stand down after one year in office. The political leaders in all parties seem to be immersed in in-fighting and jockeying for position, and they show a lamentable lack of urgency in tackling the numerous and pressing problems which all Nepalis face daily: from the chronic shortages of electricity and water, to the severe problems over pollution, transport, and unemployment. So far nothing much seems to have changed since the General Election.



A cheerful fruit vendor on the street

Turning to our own news, for us 7 February was quite a milestone as it marked the two-year anniversary of our arrival in Nepal. This means that we are due to come back to Scotland for our mid-term deputation work.



Talking on the move to arrange his next delivery of gas

We arrive in Edinburgh on 17 May. We will be at the General Assembly to attend the World Mission report on 20 May. We then look forward very much to our two 10 day periods in each of our partner Presbyteries: in Duns Presbytery from 23 May – 2 June, and then in Dunkeld & Meigle Presbytery from 6 – 16 June. In addition to this we need to have mid-term medical check-ups and de-briefing. We are also going to London to meet with the world church representatives of the Methodist Church. (As you know we are an Ecumenical Appointment, with me being supported by the Church of Scotland, and Cati being supported by the Methodist Church in Britain). Our trip to London means that we are then well placed

geographically to get to All Nations college in Hertfordshire, where we are booked in to take part in a guided Retreat.

We hope very much to see as many of you as possible during our time back in Britain. We hugely appreciate the many people who pray for us and write to us regularly and those who have raised funds for projects here. We want to say 'thank you' in person, tell you more about Nepal face to face, and pass on some of the many things we have learned here. For us it is an opportunity and a privilege to be working here in Nepal. We are looking forward to sharing both the challenges and rewards with as many of you as we can during our time back home.

With love and prayers

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