

## PARTNER PLAN

# Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal April 2013

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

Dear Friends,

### *Partner Plan letter No 7*

**Cati writes:** Since our last letter we have been involved in leading two spiritual retreats: one for missionaries with Interserve, during their annual conference on the theme of Resting in God. Then last week we were leading the annual UMN retreat for four days, on the theme of a Christian attitude towards time and how we use it. It had involved a lot of preparation and not a little anxiety, given this was the first time we were going to be the Speakers for a protracted length of time with the entire UMN staff.



High up on the back of an elephant

At the very beginning of the retreat, the director of UMN handed everything over to us with the announcement that being exposed to so many people who know us to different degrees and will continue to see us in the future can be the most difficult context in which to lead any sort of intense spiritual retreat. So we hadn't been imagining it! Evidently it's quite normal to feel more relaxed when one is anonymous!

We were staying in a hotel on the edge of Chitwan National Park with beautiful gardens and plenty of space for everyone's children's to run around.

Adults were able to find some shade under the trees whenever there was time simply to sit and catch up with one another.

Malcolm and I had seven separate slots throughout that time, so we were kept on our toes and found ourselves enjoying it more and more as each session developed its own particular rhythm. Malcolm relished being able to preach so often and we liked the intimacy of everyone sitting in a circle rather than serried rows. I had searched for songs from all over the world which could link up with the specific focus of each session. I felt unexpectedly upheld by an inner peace in teaching everything unaccompanied so as to 'listen' to the words.

The unpredictability of electricity made one evening particularly challenging, doing a lot of it by torchlight. It coincided with a session in which we were focusing on different types of time: 'agenda-driven time' versus 'time-as-a-gift,' including adjusting to Nepali time and culture. So there was plenty of laughter each time the fans suddenly ground to a halt, the lights went out and we were plunged once more into darkness!

I particularly valued the communion service we led on the last morning. It offered an important togetherness in our sharing before going our separate ways again for another year.

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Weaverbirds at work,  
Chitwan

At other times we also had opportunities for appreciating some of the wildlife of Chitwan. The weather was very hot so each day began early at around 5.30am to be able to enjoy being outside before the heat became oppressive. Daily birdwatching walks were a real highlight for us, with many new discoveries: Chestnut-headed and Green Bee-Eaters, Indian Rollers, Jungle Babblers, Open-billed Storks, White breasted and Pied Kingfishers, Red-wattled Lapwings, and a fantastic buzz of Baya Weaver

birds relentlessly flying to and from one huge Palm tree where they were constructing rival nests suspended beneath the branches.

There was also an elephant ride through the jungle which we enjoyed much more than anticipated. It wasn't the gimmicky tourist event that it might have been with crowds of people all moving en masse. Four of us were taken on the top of our elephant into areas of the jungle where we were on our own and it was extraordinarily peaceful. In spite of the elephant's massive bulk his foot-fall made absolutely no sound at all, except when crossing a river twice and enjoying the water!

A ride in dug-out canoes was unforgettable...very low down in the water and tilting alarmingly from side to side while also coming across large, open-mouthed crocodiles on the riverbank as we floated silently down-river. Once again spoilt for birdlife on all sides, but I suspect we all felt relieved to get back on terra firma at the end!



Huge feet yet extraordinarily  
quiet foot-falls!

The four days were full and enjoyable, but obviously tiring in many ways and when we returned to Kathmandu late on Saturday, I slept through the night for the first time in weeks. BLISS! Despite the anxieties beforehand we felt profoundly conscious once the retreat began that we were being upheld by prayer and we returned home hoping that everyone felt nourished as well as renewed by the break.



Climbing onto an  
elephant, Chitwan

**Malcolm writes:** As you may remember in May 2012 the Nepali Parliament was dissolved as it had failed to ratify a new Constitution, despite numerous extensions of the deadline. Since then the party that was in power at that time has stayed on as a slimmed-down caretaker government. A Westerner would think that the only task of the caretaker government would be to declare a date for new elections. But in Nepal being in power at the time of elections is thought to confer an unfair

advantage. So the main parties argued endlessly about installing a neutral caretaker Prime Minister whose task would be to fix a date and oversee the elections. At last this stalemate was resolved when most parties agreed that the Chief Justice would be acceptable in this role. Of course not all parties agreed on this, and those who objected have now begun paralysing the country with nation-wide strikes when all offices and shops are forcibly closed, and all transport is shut down.

Despite being in office now as acting Prime Minister for over a month, the Chief Justice has still not declared a new date for elections. In fact he has just been quoted as saying he hopes to hold them by December. (The monsoon period from June to September is generally accepted to be unsuitable for elections because of difficulties of transport and travel).

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We should remember that Nepal is a new democracy. The country was ruled in effect by an autocratic monarchy for centuries, and it only adopted parliamentary democracy in 1990. Since then there have been huge upheavals and changes. From 1996 onwards there was a Civil War between the Maoists and the Army. In both 2002 and 2005 the then king dissolved the Parliament and assumed executive powers. In 2006 strikes and street protests forced the king to reinstate the Parliament. The Maoists won a subsequent General Election, and in 2008 they abolished the monarchy. – So, tragically, Nepal's history, both before and after 1990, has not been at all conducive to a wide understanding of how parliamentary democracy is supposed to operate.



Armour-plating briefly sighted in the late afternoon haze of Chitwan jungle

In any event, the truth is that most people in Nepal are thoroughly disillusioned with politicians and politics. The likelihood is that the next election – whenever it comes – will probably result in another hung Parliament presiding over a country that is deeply divided by its ethnic, geographical, and language differences. It is probably naïve to put too much hope in the political process as a dramatic way forward for the people of this beautiful country, which sadly has so much need, and so much unrealised potential.

**Cati writes:** Our life here seems to be very full in all sorts of ways that are difficult to elaborate on for the simple reason that we have become involved in a wide range of different commitments that require regular attention each week. Pastoral care; church; fundraising for particular causes here; sponsorship; Nepali classes; mentoring; TEFL classes; running a marriage course; and, very importantly, maintaining vital communication with family back home.



Nisan 'walking' on his ankles before surgery

A particularly memorable experience of recent months has been primarily within the confines of the Sundar Doka church that we attend. Our letter of September 2012 introduced you to this extraordinary church where we are welcomed warmly by innumerable disabled Nepali folk whose joy in being part of God's family is tangibly evident from the moment we arrive. They offer an invaluable service called Sati Sewa for disabled children whose plight has been discovered by UMN and other partner organisations in rural areas of Nepal. With the help of voluntary donations, these children are brought to Kathmandu for life-changing surgery that previously they could only dream about. Sati Sewa accompanies them to and from hospital appointments, provides basic accommodation and food for as long as is needed and makes them feel a part of the Christian community

irrespective of their religious viewpoints. This makes them feel supported and cared for in an otherwise bewildering city. I was privileged to meet one of these children in particular. He is a wee boy called Nisan from the village of Bajhang who came to Kathmandu in December for treatment of his severe club foot disability. Weeks of treatment with serial casts on both legs preceded surgery to correct the disability and for many weeks thereafter his doting grandmother carried him around everywhere on her back. I spent time with them every time we came to church and on some afternoons during the week. Invariably Nisan greeted me with a radiant smile that revealed nothing of the suffering and struggle that had affected his short life over three years.



Nisan and his grandmother after surgery on his club feet

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After almost four months he and his grandmother made off on the three day journey to their village. I hope very much that one day we'll be able to travel to Bajhang to see for ourselves the impact of this gift of surgery. How easily we take our own health and fitness for granted until we find ourselves face-to-face with people whose lives have been blighted by years of incapacity. Yet it's often these same people whose appreciation of life and whose faith in God inspire us to be more grateful for everything we see around us!

**Malcolm writes:** In an earlier letter I mentioned my interest in the work of Development Associates International, or DAI. (See <http://www.daintl.org/> ) It is an international organisation, working in various different developing countries, whose goal is to help train up Christian leaders in the areas of personal integrity, spiritual life, leadership effectiveness, and management skills. I think this is very strategic work, and I find the twin emphasis on both Christian faith and character, and practical skills, to be very appealing. At the moment my role consists of being mentor to two of the students who are taking part in DAI's MA programme. Their names are Sher and Prashanta. I meet with them individually, as often as we can, to check all is going well with their studies, (which are all in English), to try to encourage them, and to pray with them. Maybe they and their fellow men and women on the course will one day be the leaders who will, in God's grace, be the ones who bring together the two things I referred to above: the great needs of the people of Nepal, and the country's vast unrealised potential. Please pray for them, and for me as I try to mentor them.

**Cati writes:** The second family wedding of 2013 is fast approaching and we are rejoicing in the anticipation of Angus and Hannah's marriage on 29th June! Angus has just discovered that he will be able to live and work during his first two years after graduation in Edinburgh where Hannah's Foundation Years are already underway - a real answer to prayer over many months. Their wedding plans are all taking shape and both appear to be calm and happy as the various hurdles are passed. Hannah's parents are doing a fantastic job at grassroots level in Northern Ireland where the wedding is to take place, for which we are hugely grateful. However the geographical distance between us remains as difficult now as it was before Megan and Tim's wedding in January. We would so love to be able to share in the anticipation face-to-face at such an important time in their lives. Skype and email remain vital links across the miles!

With love and prayers,

*Malcolm and Cati*

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The crocodile smile or not? Unnerving at close range from a canoe!

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