

PARTNER PLAN

Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal June 2015

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

Dear Friends

It is becoming very apparent to us that people who have never experienced an earthquake think of it (quite naturally) as a single terrifying event which happens, then is over, and fairly quickly recedes into the past. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are learning here the hard, harsh truth that the initial earthquake is only a beginning. The people of Nepal are now starting to discover first-hand the grim implications of what it means to be living in a 'post-earthquake' country. For many it will take not months, but very many years, before this event becomes part of 'the past.'



A post-earthquake kitchen

One of the immediate reasons for saying this is because of the endless aftershocks that follow every earthquake. According to Nepali seismologists there have been 258 aftershocks over magnitude 4 in the first four weeks alone following the terrifying 7.8 earthquake on 25 April. Can you imagine what it is like to live through 258 aftershocks? In each case people who feel it wonder if the ground beginning to shake will shatteringly quickly build up to be the next 'Big One' that everyone dreads.

Of course that is exactly what *did* happen on 12 May with the occurrence of the 7.3 earthquake. Technically this was only an

'aftershock,' but we can assure you that those of us who experienced it regard it very much as a second earthquake in its own right. We ourselves were in a school where we were about to give a presentation on 'Normal Responses to Traumatic Events.' Fortunately we were on the ground floor, so along with everyone else we ran pell mell outside. For what felt like a full minute the ground heaved and writhed beneath us as though we were trying to balance standing-up on a raft in rough seas. Although we were out in the open in the school courtyard we were very fearful that one of several 10,000 litre water tanks up on the roof tops around us might topple and collapse onto the small restricted space where we were all gathered. Throughout Kathmandu people poured onto the streets which quickly became clogged with people and traffic desperate to get to family members in other parts of the city. There was a strong contagious sense of panic and fear – especially when there was another extremely powerful aftershock about half an hour later.



Remains of a building precariously hangs over the rubble

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Although this earthquake was of a slightly smaller magnitude, and caused much less direct death and damage, the psychological effect of a second massive earthquake a full 17 days after the first left everyone reeling. We too had thought the earthquake was in 'the past.' But now we were getting a crash course in how an initial, hugely devastating earthquake is only a trigger for the terrible chain of events that follow, some of which are physically deadly, but many of which are psychologically crushing.



Temporary shelters set up along the streets of Kathmandu

Of course by far the worst impact of an earthquake does indeed lie in the immediate calamitous effects which fill the international news headlines for a few days. The two earthquakes have resulted in over 8,500 dead, and over 20,000 injured. In addition hundreds of thousands of buildings have been rendered uninhabitable. The UN reckons that 8 million Nepalis (almost one third of the population) will have their lives 'disrupted.' These are terrible statistics, and we grieve for the very many Nepalis who have been devastated in the most direct way imaginable.

But what is the on-going effect of the earthquakes on those of us who have not lost our lives, or our limbs, or our livelihoods? To try to illustrate an answer to this question we have collected a number of 'pen portraits' of what people have said to us in the last few weeks. We have changed names and altered details where necessary to protect their privacy, but in every case the words or actions we report are completely factual.

Raju: A Nepali man at home with his wife when the first earthquake struck. She was knocked unconscious by falling masonry and he had to carry her out in his arms as bricks and stones crashed down all around. His wife is now so traumatised that she cannot be persuaded to return to Kathmandu where he works.

Anneliese: Although unharmed herself, this earthquake brought back terrifyingly vivid and unhappy memories of living through another major earthquake several years ago when thousands were killed.

Sareena: Working in her kitchen when the first earthquake struck and heard the ear-splitting noise of human screams as the house opposite crumbled into rubble while she watched in horror. Her neighbour died trying to save her elderly mother by covering her with her own body as the walls fell down. When later pulled from the rubble both women were found tightly clasped to one another in death. The sound of their screams continues to pierce the night in Sareena's mind.



One of the houses in our street

Nina: A young widow who lives alone and who hates the solitude at night. She speaks constantly of her terror when sudden aftershocks threaten her peace of mind. Rumours of another big earthquake to come have left her with an unrelenting sense of danger. Nepal no longer feels safe.

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One of many demonstrations behind our house on constructing temporary shelter

Robert: A doctor who was helping with medical relief work in a remote mountainous area when caught up in life-threatening landslides on all sides. Falling boulders brought him face-to-face with possible death, miles from his wife and young children.

Lakshmi: She was working in a fifth floor office with several colleagues when the building suddenly began swaying as the second earthquake hit, trapping them high above the ground where they could see crowds calling at them to run down before the building collapsed. In fact the building remained standing. However this nightmare-ish

experience and the ugly cracks that remain have left all the employees now trying to choose between feeling safe, and returning to work.

Elena: A young mother of two small children. Her house is not visibly damaged but she remains so terrified of being trapped inside at night with sleeping children that she dare not stay indoors. At night the whole family sleep in a car. By day she fights off tiredness while trying to work.

Alice: A young girl in her final year of school and trying to study for exams that are vital for university entrance. The second earthquake struck just before sitting an exam, forcing immediate cancellation. Only a day later it was re-scheduled without her knowledge and she had to run to school after a text asking where she was.

Umesh: A Christian Nepali whose wife is Hindu. She is now profoundly influenced by religious astrological prophecies that Nepal is approaching a so-called 'inauspicious' day when the next earthquake is bound to strike. Such different approaches considerably complicate their ability to work through their fears together.



Remains of a Hindu temple in Kathmandu



A young girl carries her baby brother amidst the rubble of their village

Henri and Ana: A young couple whose fears when the earthquake struck were acutely exacerbated by having small children dependent on them for protection. They left the country as soon as they could find a ticket available.

Deepak: A UMN driver who took us to the airport to meet a new UMN arrival at around midnight. The plane was delayed several hours and when asked if he would be able to return home to his family after dropping us off at home, he replied quietly that he currently has no home to go to. His family, like so many others, are sleeping outside and he himself would be joining several colleagues under a tarpaulin in the UMN grounds for the remainder of that night.

Rabin: A young blind man who was in church when the first earthquake struck, just a week after being baptised as a new Christian. For him the earthquake could have been indescribably

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terrifying since he has absolutely no sight whatsoever. Yet when we visited him he told us with a wide smile that he felt completely safe because of the care of those around him. They were able to act as his eyes in all the chaos of shifting ground. For this man, the earthquake had confirmed his faith in the power God's love shown so tangibly through his people.

We end by giving heartfelt thanks to all of you who have assured us of your ongoing prayers, and to all of you who have so generously donated money to the work of UMN. If you want to know what UMN has done, and plans to do next, you will find there is much information, which is updated regularly, on our website: <http://www.umn.org.np/>

Please do not forget the people of Nepal.

With love and prayers,

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A village we visited outside Kathmandu

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