

PARTNERPLAN

Malcolm & Cati Ramsay - Nepal August 2013

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

Dear Friends



Happy parents!

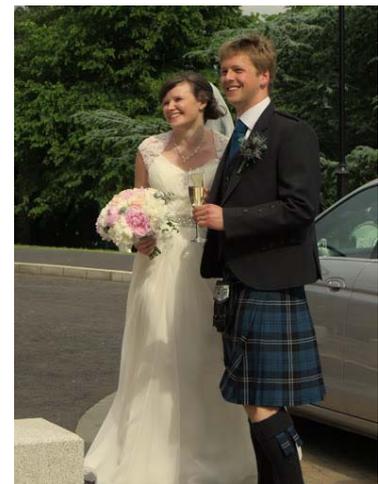
Cati writes: The most exciting news of this past month has, without doubt, been the second family wedding in the space of six months! We flew to Scotland a week before Angus and Hannah's wedding, relishing the joy of being reunited with the family again for such a special occasion! We then drove over to Belfast, where final preparations were completed in a festive spirit, both in the church and in Riddell Hall where the reception was to be held. Then on 29th June we celebrated the unforgettable dedication of Angus and Hannah committing themselves in marriage to one another before God and family and friends. Malcolm found the experience of conducting their wedding profoundly

moving and a wonderfully appropriate choice of music had been chosen unexpectedly for the wedding finale! As we processed out of the church, the Praise Band entertained us all by playing and singing Dusty Springfield's song 'Son of a Preacher Man' ... 'the only one who could ever reach me was the son of a preacher man!' It was greeted immediately with a round of applause, recognising the wonderfully apt insertion of Angus' name into the lyrics.

Innumerable small touches of creativity and imagination during months of planning and preparation by the Milligan family and friends made the reception venue also uniquely personal and memorable. Even wedding photos from both parents and grandparents on either side had been traced and put on display. Seeing the infectious happiness of Angus and Hannah throughout the day will remain indelibly fixed in our memories! Scottish dancing late into the night finally brought a beautiful day to a close.

It was a joy to have some precious time afterwards with Megan and Tim, exploring parts of Northern Ireland's coastline for three days before they had to fly back to Canada. They seem to have adjusted very happily into marriage and saying goodbye again for another year was desperately hard. Somehow the ache of missing family spread across the globe never really seems to get any easier.

We returned to Edinburgh in time for the next special occasion exactly a week later: Angus' graduation from medicine after six long years. This coincided with a veritable heat wave in Scotland so the sun was shining brilliantly and gave the day a great



Arrival of bride and groom
at Riddell Hall

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atmosphere in which to celebrate. It persisted throughout Angus and Hannah's honeymoon in South Uist and they gave us a wonderful surprise by appearing at Edinburgh airport just as we were checking into our flight back to Nepal.

Our trip was an intensely emotional and happy time for all the family. Barely a year ago we received the two phone calls on 28th July announcing parallel engagements. Now instead of one family we have become three; and we feel so grateful for our new son and daughter in law! Looking back over events of the past year it's impossible to do them justice in words!



Monsoon rain offers little hope of drying!

Malcolm writes: This year the monsoon rains have been *much* heavier than last year. In fact in May (technically in the 'pre-monsoon rains') our flat was flooded. Everyone here who knows our house was very surprised to hear this – as they know that we live on the first floor! What happened was that there was continuous *torrential* rain that lasted well over an hour. Our house has two balconies over which the gutters are defective, or badly positioned, and the drainage holes set into the balcony floors are tiny. The result was that both balconies quickly filled up like paddling pools. Once the water level reached the level of the sills of the doorways it began draining into our kitchen from one balcony, and down our communal stair from the other.

We and our downstairs neighbours worked feverishly with buckets and mops, but despite our best efforts all but two rooms of our house were inundated. Once it was all over we spent a week with newspaper and fans to dry out our one room that has a fixed carpet. (The others have plain stone floors). Fortunately no permanent damage was done. We were very thankful for this, and as is so often the case in Nepal, we were very conscious how different the same storm must have been for poor people. Those living in flimsy buildings, or precarious locations, would have suffered severe loss, and even risk to their lives, from this same sustained cloudburst that for us was merely a memorable evening.

The monsoon proper lasts from June to September, and so far this year the rainfall has been very frequent and intense. The effects were very obvious last week when we paid our bi-monthly visit to Tansen Mission Hospital. This involves a ten hour (on a good day!) bus journey to the west of Kathmandu. The bus crawls out through the congested and clogged streets of Kathmandu, and then drops steeply down alarming hairpin bends to the valley of the Trishuli River. This time the river was swollen and gorged. In places huge tree trunks were hurtling downstream as though they were twigs. The route heads west, then south, to the Terai plains close to the border with India. At Narayangadh it crosses the Narayani River. Here the river had burst its banks on both sides, and the houses at the water's edge had been completely immersed. I presume some had simply been swept away. The bridge was crammed with local onlookers using it as a vantage point to survey the devastation.



A happy day!

The journey rattles through intense heat along the plains for 2½ hours, weaving among cycle rickshaws in the towns, then from Butwal, for the final leg, it goes steeply north uphill to Tansen. This road snakes up the sides of precipitous mountains, and is very prone to landslides in times of

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torrential rain. In numerous places there had been recent landslides. Our passage would have been completely blocked, but thankfully by the time of our journey the landslides were being cleared sufficiently for vehicles to get through. This work is done mainly by manual labour by men working with picks and shovels, so in many cases only enough rubble had been removed for one-way traffic. Given the monsoon-soaked road conditions we were especially glad to reach Tansen this time without incident.

Cati writes: Another memorable event since last writing was five days of trekking together in April. We walked to Poon Hill, a renowned vantage point for views of the Annapurna mountains. The trek coincided with heavy rain every day that took us completely unawares since the monsoon hadn't officially started. However our spirits remained high as we relished the beauty of magnificent wild Rhododendrons in flower, literally carpeting the mountains with colour. Climbing Poon Hill itself at 4.30am to see the sunrise was without doubt the highlight of our trip: a perfectly timed break in the wet weather, giving us two hours of breath-taking views over the Himalayas! Once again the massive majesty of these mountains reduced our lives to their true miniature perspective in God's creation.



Poon Hill Rhododendrons ablaze with colour in abundance!

Malcolm writes: In May there was the annual Board meeting of UMN and, overlapping with this, the bi-annual General Assembly of UMN, which many representatives of partner churches attended, including from the Church of Scotland. So on one free day we took one of our visitors to Pashupatinath, situated on the banks of the River Bagmati. It is one of the holiest sites of Hinduism in Nepal, and is the Nepali equivalent of Varanasi on the banks of the sacred River Ganges in India.



A plane flying over the Annapurna mountains at sunrise, seen from Sarangkot

Hinduism is an enormously complex subject, and I don't claim even to begin to understand it, but to visit Pashupatinath is to be reminded of the absolutely central role it plays in the lives of many Nepalis. All around the site there are Hindu temples. Non-Hindus are forbidden from entering the main temple, but surrounding it are numerous smaller places of worship and statues to the various Hindu gods. In amongst this warren of buildings jostle an incongruous mix of people: orange robed Sadhus, or Hindu holy men, their foreheads smeared with ash; ordinary worshippers burning candles or offering gifts of food or flowers at the smaller shrines; shop-keepers, stall-holders, and guides touting their services; and a good number of tourists, both Nepali and foreign.

At the centre of all this lies the Bagmati River with 'ghats' or platforms jutting out onto the edge of the river where cremations take place. Every time we have visited this place a number of cremations have been underway. On this occasion a body was carried to a ghat while we were there. We watched respectfully from the other side of the river. It was obvious that various rituals were carried out over the body, performed first by the male members of the family. During this period other Nepalis were going about their ordinary business, including, for example, a young boy

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who was playing up to his knees in the river only a few yards away from the ghat. The Bagmati runs right through the middle of Kathmandu and sadly is notoriously polluted. At this location (at least pre-monsoon) it is also fairly narrow, sluggish, and not at all impressive to look at as a river. However from a Hindu point of view to be cremated here, and to have your ashes then swept into the Bagmati is an important way of being purified spiritually before re-entering the great cycle of rebirth and reincarnation that is such a central view of Hinduism.

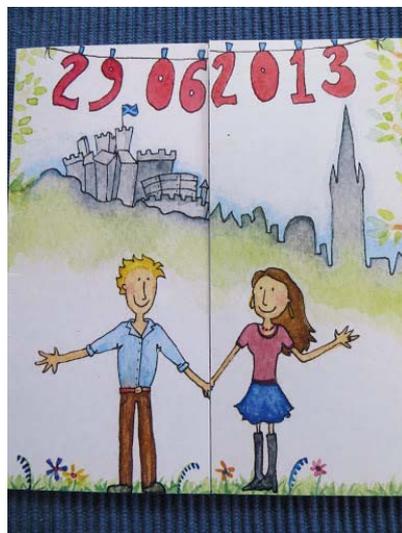
For me, visiting a place like Pashupatinath is a jolting reminder of how much the differing faiths and cultures share, but also how much we differ. We all grieve the loss of those we have loved, and want to mark their deaths with appropriate rituals. To catch a glimpse of how others grapple with these age-old questions is for me both an assertion of our common humanity, and a reminder of the very differing answers that we give to these questions. For me as a Christian, working in Nepal has made me more, not less grateful, that I can meet death with faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. But it is the Nepalis who are at the difficult and sensitive interface between Hindus and Christians here. The Nepali church (which is growing strongly) needs our prayers for great wisdom and grace from God, as they struggle to work out what it means to be not just Nepalis, and not just Christians, but rather, what it means to be *Nepali Christians*.

With love and prayers,

Malcolm and Cati

amalcolmransay@gmail.com

catiransay@gmail.com



Angus and Hannah's wedding invitation!

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