

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with:



The Methodist Church 

Gillian Rose - Bangladesh April 2013

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Dear Friends in Scotland

Sunday 31st March 2013 and Easter Sunday, and what better joyful day could I find to start to pen you all a letter, and bring you up to date with what has been happening since I signed off my last letter to you just before Christmas.

And it really is a beautiful day, warm sun, blue hazy sky, trees and shrubs green with the delightful green of new spring growth, and birdsong filling the air. It seems the very day is celebrating the joy of the resurrection with us. The fruit trees are heavy with blossom, now giving way to tiny lychees and mangoes a herald of a good fruit season to come. The fruit for the year is to be sold today. And in the hospital grounds the jack fruit trees are also promising a good year, their strange fruits growing directly out of the trunk and branches. Jackfruit makes a delicious vegetable curry which the girls enjoy and they also enjoy eating ripe jackfruit, if the monkey's don't get them first!!



I have lost my dog Tom for the moment; he is probably in the vicinity of the girls dining room, where they are enjoying an Easter Sunday chicken curry with their rice!! This too is a very special event for our students ("the girls") as meat is an expensive item, and we only manage to give them a meat curry on high days and holidays i.e. Christmas day, New Year's day and Easter!

Today I am on sole duty for the hospital, the trained staff having a special day off to spend the festival with their families, and the girls running the hospital themselves. I am just back from the "G" ward (Geriatric) as it is called, and enjoyed seeing them all enjoying their midday meal, their food being brought from the girls kitchen; and my newest group enjoying being in sole charge of their grannies and granddads for the day. Many of them need to be fed by hand and helped with everything, which is good basic nursing practice for the junior girls, and it is a joy to watch them at work.

But to recap.....

Christmas has faded away into memory land and only the joy of the season can be recalled, with its ward decorations, huge illuminated star over the hospital gate leading patients for care and the wise men to the stable created under the mango tree.

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December 31st 2012 brought farewells for another group of 17 girls who had completed their three year training and left us to put to use what they had learned as they take up employment all over the country.

Tuesday January 1st 2013 brought the traditional start to the Church of Bangladesh year, a joyful sung parish communion service, with the church packed to the doors, and overflowing. Perhaps the most well attended service in the church year and a lovely start and a new beginning. And directly after the service, packing into the new hospital car, and off to the weekly clinic at Karpasdanga clinic, where more than 100 patients are waiting for us.

And New Year's Day has been "text Book Festival day" for the school children of the land, with the government providing every child with all the text books he needs, a feat indeed, considering the huge burgeoning population where every level at school has a million and more children on the role!! The newspapers showed ecstatic children gleefully emerging from school, their brand new books held high for all to see. I was reminded of the tatty old books we used to have passed on year by year when I was a student at the local grammar school!!

Monday January 14th 2013 brings another group of new girls with their bedding and boxes, all eager to train to be a nurse at Bollobhpur Hospital. They have come from all parts of the country, and it is good to be able to report that despite the usual few teething troubles and bouts of homesickness, all have settled down well together and are now in their 3rd month and studying hard for their preliminary training school final examination and the coveted nurses dress and cap a pass mark will earn.

The months have brought our monthly community health meetings where all clinic staff from the outlying village clinics gather to bring their monthly reports and to learn something new together. There is great competition between the clinics which is good. The months also bring the monthly change over (all change) of the student nurses between the clinics and involves the trip to Khulna to support Reba and disabled Kalpona there and to bring oxygen and supplies for the hospital.

In the wards the winter months have seen small occupants in all the incubators with the girls caring for them day and night. And it is wonderful to be able to report that there were no small deaths, all went home fully suckling at their mother's milk.

31st January 2013 and we had to say a sad goodbye to six of our staff who had either come to retirement age or completed 30 years of service, according to the rules of the Synod of the Church of Bangladesh. These included our driver Sunil, with whom I had travelled many miles and visited many places in the country in the course of my work. We were pleased to receive our new driver, Mr Rintu Mondol, who was transferred from Rajshahi Mission Hospital to us. Rintu is a Bollobhpur man, and is happy to be able at last to live in and work from his own home.

Wednesday 15th February is marked on my calendar as the 'day of the monkeys' when a large troupe mainly large heavy males descend on the hospital compound, probably in search of food. We were in our hospital chapel for morning prayers and were being led by Michael who is in charge of the lab and x-ray. But his words of wisdom were lost in the amazing thumps and bumps as they crashed onto the tin roof before taking off for the nearest building or tree. The chapel roof is now like the waves of the ocean and obviously will not keep out the rain in the rainy season!!

The monkeys finally grouped along the river wall and watched us and listened the the last hymn! They were probably wondering what all those strange animals were doing sitting on the ground and making a noise instead of swinging comfortably in the trees!

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Monday 25th February and another group have completed their anatomy and nursing studies, passed the examinations and started their midwifery classes with me. It is always a joy to start teaching a new group, they are all so fresh and keen. Many remain keen students to the end of the course, but not all!!

Sunday March 10th, Palm Sunday and the congregation processes singing 'Hosannah' around the village before entering the church for parish communion. Bollobhpur village has many date palm trees, from which palm crosses are made, and most people have made their own to bring along and children have a whole frond-like branch from the tree, every spike decorated with a tiny cross. And directly after the service the team from Bangladesh National Society for the Blind hospital in Khulna has arrived for another "Eye Camp" and soon the girls are enjoying the day, lining up the waiting patients, many blind or semi-blind, guiding them to the Doctor's table and we have two nice lady doctors this time to see the patients. The rest of the team are old friends.

Eventually 40 patients are selected for surgery (one fails to return from a quick visit home) and we help them onto the waiting bus as their names are called one by one. An enjoyable and energetic day. And we pray God all will return with new sight – "I can see!"

The bus is due to return with the patients on Wednesday, but yet another general strike is called by a political party and they are rushed back a day earlier. The country is being crippled by general strikes and people's lives, children's education and the livelihood of ordinary law abiding people disrupted. Vehicles are being torched and burned galore, shops and businesses wrecked. Even to a party of demonstrators breaking into a primary school and beating up the headmaster, teachers and children for having the school open when they had summoned a strike!

We thought we were well off in this forgotten country area but not so. For gangs of mostly youths are using the occasion to collect toll from the general public, intimidating and threatening people over mobile phone and recipients of threats are panicking and selling whatever they have to pay the toll required in fear of their own lives or the lives of their children.

Indeed a local doctor and his daughter were killed in broad daylight, their home just yards from our clinic in Ratanpur village which has made everyone very jumpy and insecure, and the whole village battens up by dark in the evenings. The reason was political most likely but that does not help peoples feeling of insecurity.

And all across the country the homes, shops, businesses and temples of the Hindu community are being targeted. May God bring peace to our benighted land and true democracy instead of political wrangling and rivalry.

Maundy Thursday found us all at the evening community service and the foot washing ceremony. I liked the idea of the new Pope celebrating in a prison and washing feet there, including women and a Muslim prisoner.

Good Friday morning found me en route for our Kejura village clinic as it is 'all change' day for the girls there. But there are very few patients this morning, the farming community being busy harvesting their sweet corn and by 12 o'clock we have finished the clinic and all go across to the tiny Kejura Parish Church (there are six Christian families beside Pascolina and Aparech and their two girls at the clinic) and the catechist leads us in the 3 hours of devotions at the foot of the cross. Each of the seven words from the cross are discussed and presented by a member of the church and Dr Hirok (Martin) Chowdhury from Chuadanga is also present and preaches on the word – "it

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is finished". I felt it a joy and privilege to be able to worship with that tiny Christian community on such a special day.

But to come to an end – this was going to be a very short letter but I seem to have rambled on as usual. It is dark as I finish the day being interspersed with calls to the ward to admit patients – one such being a tiny 700gm premature baby, being brought a long distance by ambulance and at a lot of expense. Such is the way the Bengali people feel about their children. I got the baby breathing again, signed her with the cross on her tiny forehead and popped her into an incubator with oxygen supply. The rest is in God's hands. So very small!

It is dark now, the trees along the river bank silhouetted against a star studded sky, and a few fireflies are moving amongst them their tiny lights like Christmas lights twinkling off and on. In the nearby cowshed, the cows are bedded down under their new mosquito net. Two of the young ones were sold last month to make room! The two 'new' calves now getting big and naughty and go out together for a walk around the village! The three mothers are all expecting another calf in December even elderly Junu, this with be her 15th!!

I managed to catch Tom eventually for his Sunday bath, which he really enjoys once caught!! He is now stretched out full length recovering! Tom is lazy. Tinja, his younger sister, is a good guard dog, and spends most of the night speeding around the compound barking and chasing away something or other. And the hospital has filled up with cats recently, people push unwanted kittens inside the hospital gate!

Thank you for keeping behind us with your prayer and your concern.

Our greetings

