

Newsletter SIKKIM 2009

Stichting Kinderen van Sikkim
Rekeningnummer: 9227356

18 april

At 4 in the morning the temperature in Delhi is still 28 Celsius. I travel with Ronnie, a former colleague who will teach at SHA for the second time. We are lucky with the opening that day of a new domestic airport and are received with all sort of small presents, including a thika. The building is high-tech the Indian way, a futuristic design but everywhere loose ends of electricity etc. But nicely clean, still.



In Bagdogra G.S., one of the local teachers is waiting for us with a jeep. As it is Sunday he took one of the students, Rinchen with him. On the way we also pick up Maree, another teacher and recently married to G.S. She has been visiting her sick mother in the hospital.

Rinchen is 17 and goes to the government school, together with 7 other students who choose to stay after class 5 at SHA. We once thought it would be nice to have some older children around to help the small ones. They also help if necessary in the kitchen, also the boys...

Rinchen is responsible for the separate boy's hostel in the village where 12 boys stay.

As always it's fantastic to arrive and see the children happy and in good health. There are 2 volunteers, Barbara from Poland and Leonie from Germany. Barbara is a professional teacher and Leonie starts a pedagogical study in September.



The boys hostel of Rinchen

The next morning.

Hello miss and good morning miss and the feeling to be home. It's funny to see how much they like to be hugged while it's not part of their culture at all. Presents and letters from different sponsors are distributed and I have a long conversation with Jamyang, our principal. About the children but also about himself. We know already for some time that he wants to leave in order to work abroad and earn some substantial money. India does not have old people's pension and he wants to secure himself of some quiet and comfortable last years.

But he promises to stay at least another 2 years to supervise the building of the new school. Good to know.

At the same time there is some urgency in finding a replacement as this building affair will take most of his time. At the beginning of this year an ad was put in the newspapers and we had some 20 reactions. Interviews have to be held and it would be good if this can happen while I am here. First we are going to talk to Mr Wangdi in Darjeeling, a friend and former classmate of Jamyang who thinks highly of him.

We also decide to visit the 'Graham boys' (4 of our children who thanks to generous sponsors now study at one of the best schools in the region)

And what about the girls? In general we try to equally favour the boys and girls but in this case it did not happen so far. According to Jamyang there is only one eligible girl, Hissey who is now attending class 6 at the government school. We decide to take her along when we visit the boys, to see if she likes it. Going to Kalimpong will be already quite an adventure for her as she never crossed the border of Sikkim before.



Pet animals

That evening Ronnie makes a tombola with the pet animals she brought from Holland. The small kids each can grab one from the big bag, blindfolded. They are all excited. Even the smaller animals are greeted with great enthusiasm.



They are though immediately put away and Ronnie has to explain that these toys are meant to take to bed, to be cherished and cuddled. They only half understand and when a few weeks later they return from holidays, a lot have stayed behind at home. Just like a lot of their clothes. Understandable as what would you do when you arrive home with a bag full of clothes and your brothers and sisters have nothing? We don't encourage these shifts but no punishment either.

For example I brought small batteries for Sonam for a clip-on lamp to read that I gave him last year. When asked if it still works he looks at me blankly. Doesn't he have it anymore?

After a while he confesses that he gave it to his father. But Sonam, your father can't read at all, what does he use it for? At the toilet outside the house miss. I should have known. Especially he and his friend Samten are always worried about their family and sometimes ask if they can have the leftovers of the clothes that are send for the family.

Mayke and Anouk

The last school hour I tell class 4 about Mayke and Anouk. Two Dutch girls who wrote a musical as a school project and decided to perform it as well and to give the entrance fees as a donation to SHA. The story of the musical leaves them a little puzzled (about love and vengeance) but the amount of money (16.000 rupees) makes a big impression.



Kalimpong, Dr Grahams

Hiskey was flabbergasted when we told her she could come along. She would hardly speak the whole day. It's complicated to travel at election time as all cars and jeeps are confiscated by the political parties. One half of the province visits the other half to attend political meetings. Severe social control apparently as to who attends which one and especially which ones not. The whole country comes to a stand still for 3 weeks. We are lucky to find a taxi to Jorethang



Rha Tshering, Chezang, Samyor en Nedup

(halfway) and from there a regular shared jeep to Kalimpong. We have to wait 2 hours but that's not unusual. In Kalimpong I buy clothes for the boys as the school only provides the uniform. And a huge bag of sweets. Hissey is Alice in Wonderland. The boys look great, like from a posh English boarding school. I am moved by the way they behave and to see how well they do. They share a big house with 40 other boys and have a couple as father and mother. Mother is very pleased with them and also the school results are for above average. Chezang is the best. Unfortunately his sponsor had to stop this year and we will have to look for another one. They seem happy and before their next class they write a letter for their sponsor for me to take with me. The idea of having Hissey at school as their little sister is exciting to them. I ask them to look after her next year but this might be a little problematic as boys are not allowed to talk to girls (!) We have to ask dispensation.

In front of the building where the director of the school resides we meet the new manager. Mister Gibson is from England and just started today. He had written a report on the school as a volunteer and after that they asked him to come over to put the advices in practice. A so-called decent chap. He makes some notes on Hissey and does not see why not she could come. She has to attend some admission exam anyway.



Interview

The candidate principal in Darjeeling is not the dream candidate I was hoping for. Kind of shy and also I can't imagine him being nice and warm with the children. From here we have to plan our trip to Dzongu. Ronnie is coming along because she was there also 2 years ago and curious to see the new school building (that we paid for). The Mayel Lyang Academy is a private school with around 50 children of which 20 are sponsored by us. These 20 live in a hostel near the school, the other ones live in the village with their family.

Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim can be reached but there it stops. Loden, the director of MLA arranges for a private jeep to pick us up. We buy clothes for the children and have some blouses made for ourselves by Munna the tailor. While waiting on the doorstep a woman approaches me, shyly. She needs money because of kidney problems. Doesn't she have a husband? Yes, cab driver in Delhi, but he does not send any money. Her English is not bad and also her clothes look neat but I know that this is often deceiving as they might be the only clothes they have got. I say something like that I can't help everybody but what kind of medicine does she need? Three photocopies with doctors scribble. How much does she need? 200 (3 euro) She disappears as silent as she came. No idea if it's true but better this than doubts and guilt.



The new school in Dzongu

Dzongu

Welcome fantastic. We meet Nimlakit, the new principal, a sturdy young lady of 25. We put all the clothes we bought on a bed and ask the children one by one to come in and choose something. It is so seldom that they can choose and they very much appreciate.



There is already a lot of singing and dancing going on as the day after there is a cultural day, in our honour. Two volunteers here too, from The Czech Republic. They wanted to visit Dzongu but could not get a permit and met Loden by accident. Michael and Jenna. Nice people but with terrible accents (much worse than our Dutch...) One of the sponsored children, Lyandup, has been moved to the tribal school in

Mangan. A fantastic opportunity as tribal schools can be compared with our school in Buriakop in the sense that everything is free and the standard of teaching high. Tribal schools are fully subsidized by the government and cover up to class 12.

Kumzer has not seen a dentist yet but Loden promises to take them all to the dentist for a check up. Have to remind him because when no pain, no hurry.

Loden asks permission to spend the 13.000 rupees that he did not use last year on a television set. Is fine as long as they are not going to spend hours watching silly soaps.

Pema is by far the best student in school and as he is already a little older than the rest I ask Loden to see if he can skip one class as this will better his chances for future studies. Of the 20 sponsored children 6 go to the government school because MLA only covers up to class 4.

In the afternoon the children leave for a visit to the Lepcha House, a kind of museum. Phurba is very ill on return and we suspect he ate some poisonous berries, he is too curious.

Discuss with Loden our search for a new principal and he suggests talking to Premkit, a teacher who used to work in Buriakop and by now has finished her studies and gathered more experience.

The cultural day is a big success. It is presented by Ponalmit, in fluent English. Premkit passé by and wishes to meet the teachers at SHA and taste the atmosphere. Of course she is more than welcome and we invite her for next weekend. Next day we leave for Gangtok. Dawa and Sonam take our luggage down, very pleasant because due to the rain the path is very slippery. Loden comes along, to look for a TV and other things. We have a meeting with the Rotary who still is willing to help us and make SHA as their next project, provided the Dutch branch is initiating.



Back to Buriakop

On Sunday the children are brought back from the holidays. Always nice to be there as you see the parents and hear the stories. Rekchen's mother who has to walk for 3 hours down the mountain en after those 5 hours up. Sonams father as usual with bare feet after hours walking. Ronnie wants to give him her sandals but he shyly tells her that he has never worn shoes in his whole life. I still have some shirts and when I hand him over a polo he is quite happy. Later I ask Sonam if his father has work – not every day. Tashi's mother sleeps somewhere in the village and has brought some eggs (a delicacy and luxury as due to the bird flu difficult to get)

Discuss with Jamyang how to proceed with the new principal, the new building, an architect etc. Propose to appoint a matron when we have a new hostel who will look after the clothes, hygiene and overall wellbeing of the children and who is present at night. Now the local teachers sleep at the school, alternating. Later the idea of a matron is met with enthusiasm by everybody and we decide to look for one already now. In the new hostel there also should be a separate room for sick children and where parents can stay the night over. Floors should be concrete but the walls can be of wood. There is a special system that the iron of the barrels used by the road are flattened and filled up with clay. The owners of the land we are going to buy have given permission to start building but that seems risky to me. Although we will pay this week a substantial advance, the official papers are still not ready. We though can start with planting trees and bamboo. We also have to reserve a plot for animals: we should have a cow and at least some chickens. Solar panels could be useful for when the electricity fails. (Very often) Financially this is not exciting as we pay monthly 22 rupees (30 cent)



SIKKIM HIMALAYAN ACADEMY
Programme

- 1 Classes Nursery, LKG, UKG : A Nursery Rhyme.
- 2 Yangzom & Chung Chung : A Lepcha Dance
- 3 Bhawana and party her friends : Hindi dance . ,
- 4 English number Casss 1 to IV. When the saints come marching in
- 5 Bhutia Dance . Lemit and Phurkit
- 6 Nepali Dance: Badal, Bibek, Topden & Reckchen

TEA BREAK

- 6 Nepali Dance: Sanjita and Yhesay
- 7 A skit : presented by Ausbin, Dawa Namgyal, Dawa Gurung , Lakpa, Nitesh and Gyarso.
8. Bhutia Dance: Sonam, Tshering, Yangzom and Chung Chung
9. A Nepali number 'Gairi Khet Ko
10. Nepali song 'Phul ko akha ma phulai sansara'
- 11 Miss Jannie's speech
- 12 Mrs Maree's speech

Before I leave we have a meeting with the whole staff. A lot is clarified about minutes send by email and returned with questions. We discuss the curriculum, the new building, the children, the new principal and the forthcoming visit of Premkit.



A word of thanks to the local teachers:
Anamika, Maree, Sumitra, G.S., Jamyang, Lopen

The last Saturday we have a party. Weeks of preparations, singing and dancing. A complete programme is made. As usual a lot of parents of the children in the village attend – always very nice! The mothers have made flower strings for the teachers and offer katha's. Also a lot of sweets as I celebrate my birthday. Nitesh helps with the distribution and does a terrific job.

Just on time the papers for the preliminary buying contract arrive from Delhi. On signing we find out that part of the promised land has been sold to someone else. In return there is another piece but still owned by the brother of Hasta. We send for the brother who refuses. After a long time the deal is made possible and the papers are signed by the panchyat and 4 other witnesses.

The morning after I leave.

Hugs and kisses and promise to come back. The jeep is one hour late and on the way we have a flat tire, the last stretch is a nightmare, in order to catch the plane at Bagdogra, but o.k. In Delhi I have a meeting with Guneet of try legal, one of the lawyers who help us pro deo with all legal matters and discuss the latest events. And then its Amsterdam.