



NEWSLETTER

ISSUED IN CHRISTMAS 2017

**NEVER BE IN DOUBT THAT
A SMALL GROUP OF COMMITTED PEOPLE CAN
CHANGE THE WORLD!
THIS IS ACTUALLY THE ONLY WAY
IN WHICH THE WORLD HAS EVER CHANGED.**

by Margaret Mead

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,

This proposition of the ethnologist Margret Mead has accompanied me for a long time – although I would not use the grand words “change the world”. But that a small group of committed people can change something in the world – you and your generous and loyal support have certainly documented this fact during the last years. So you are the living proof of what Margret Mead saw.

Your help has improved the lives of any single one among the Shanti family, so that it has become full of dignity! Especially the people outcast from Nepalese society can experience safety and security here:

Security that they can eat every day, get medical help, and their children get an education and thus a perspective for their future;

Security because of the real home they have at Shanti where nobody will expel them and they are treated as human beings.

PAINTING OUR MEDICAL CENTER

It is a custom at the end of the year for many people to look back into the last months. I wish to take you there with my review of 2018:

I am so grateful for the evident changes all “Shanti’s” experience with joy every day:

The talented painters among the patients had the wonderful plan to embellish the outside walls of the medical center with their beautiful paintings. The inside walls have been painted a long time ago. They thought of this themselves!

We happily agreed. With great dedication, they set up the bamboo scaffolds, and painting teams were



formed. Nathuni painted a large panel together with Panchadhoj, and below that, Jogendra and his wife Reika painted a joyful, colorful picture.

Shyama, who is another talented painter – and very, very busy! – had courage enough to paint a long wall painting in the room in front of the kitchen where the vegetables are prepared for cooking. She also decorated the walls of Asha's room. Asha is the most severely disabled of all our children. Asha has no eyes, she is deaf and she cannot walk. She is also strongly mentally disabled. Now, the carers of the child can do their hard work in a nice room finally! You may know Shyama already from our most recent letter: She decorated the dentist's surgery with the beautiful garlands.

RADHA AND HER FAMILY

The paper makers were inspired when they saw such nice and colorful external walls. Radha for example, climbed on to the table and painted colored flowers on the ceiling and the walls. She was amazed about her sudden talent, and she is so proud when we praise her!

We have a special story to tell about Radha. She has been with Shanti for 23 years. Her husband, Chetra Bahadur, was often ashamed because his hand is only a stump due to the leprosy illness. The village cast the small family out, and the couple did not know how to raise their two small sons. We gave them a home, of course.

Radha learned how to weave with Shanti. But her back was aching more and more, so she changed to paper manufacture. Her two sons, Rajendra and Dipendra, attended our Shanti school; Chetra Bahadur helped with his healthy hand in the vegetable garden wherever he could.

And then we saw how well they understood Shanti's mission: We care for each other even if we are not related by kin! A small boy ran to Chetra Bahadur one morning in excitement, pulling him to a small bush near our station, and there a tiny baby was lying there, whining away. The mother apparently hoped that someone would find the little girl.

Chetra Bahadur carefully lifted the baby and took her to Radha. Both came to us, asking whether we could help them to raise the child. We were so touched about so much loving charitable care, and we were happy about the new Shanti child. We named her Karuna.

It was especially Chetra Bahadur who developed a special relationship with his little daughter – he, who had found her himself!

This is why Karuna was particularly hurt when her adopting father on his bicycle was hit by a coach right around the corner of our center.

Heiko noticed the glass of the broken windshield in the street when we rode back five minutes later on the same road. He parked our car and immediately accompanied Chetra Bahadur to the neurological hospital where he was taken.

That morning, our friendly and balanced Chetra passed away. The entire Shanti family participated in his cremation in the afternoon of that day. All were deeply shocked, trying to soothe Radha and the children as best we could.

Radha was a widow now – the widow of a leper even. That's a hard fate in Nepal; we are unable to imagine this, benefiting from our own social security system.



The hospital fees alone amounted to 980 US-Dollar, an enormous sum to be paid by the surviving family. Chetra Bahadur had undergone emergency surgery upon arrival. Nepal does not have a health insurance system. Heiko immediately paid the invoice – otherwise the body could not have been released for cremation! And the costs for cremation and the meal afterwards for the mourning visitors, some rice, vegetables and lentils.

Radha and her children would have fallen into misery without Shanti's help. The coach company paid a lump-sum of 300 US\$ injury money to Radha. This was just enough for the rent for six months.

Life continued, however. Rajendra and Dipendra completed school a few years after their father's accidental death. Rajendra went to work in Arabia, where he is still living. Dipendra works as a taxi driver to earn his living.

Finally, Karuna's story – a real fairy-tale. She is 21 years old today and trained as a nursing assistant. Three months ago, the "foundling" married a hard-working Nepalese man, who has a work permit for Australia, enabling her to continue her training as a nurse. Both live in Melbourne.

Radha is now living alone. Her back does not hurt so much anymore because of the frequent sessions with our empathic physical therapist. She sits at the table in the paper workshop with six other women. She feels accepted and noticed there, and is happy about every day spent in the community.

She has not even to worry about her surviving, for Shanti grants everybody a basic salary – similar to our social benefits. But: It is not the government which pays, but you, dear donors, are the people who provide the security net for the people having such a hard destiny. You give them financial security

and a home in a community such as it is possible at Shanti. I am so grateful to you for this, again and again, from all my heart!

IN SINDHOUPALCHOWK

This is what I wrote to you from Dortmund. And now I have been in Nepal again for five days, hoping I can transmit to you the experiences I intensely feel here – so that you can try to imagine what kind of lives of the people here live.

I think I have reported several times about the people and the reconstruction of houses in the epicenter of the earthquakes of 2015. But the hard lives the locals are leading here for more than three years now is a bitter reality, which I had to notice directly the day before yesterday when I drove there in the car. We had to drive the 115 km to our planned location on dangerously narrow, extremely curvy, stony roads. We were given a good shaking for six hours every day...

The dwellings of the people of Sindhoupalchowk are scattered at great distances. They live in re-used stables and huts clad in corrugated iron leaning to the slopes. Everybody is happy to see us – many know us from their time in the tent camp on the Kathmandu football ground. I had put on sturdy, high-shafted boots and warm winter clothes. But I caught a cold in spite of this. I was deeply shattered to see how the villagers went around the rocky, mountainous ground in flip-flops without stockings!

The huts are situated 2,100 m high above sea level, where it gets bitterly cold in winter. It snows, and condensate will collect from the breathing air of people under the roof, dripping down inside.

No wonder that everybody then suffers from coughs and sneezes and even pneumonia here.



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This region does not (yet) have a health center, however. So we wished to provide the main teacher of the small school the most important medicine for the locals: plant drugs against sneezes, coughs and throat sores, first-aid packages, dressing material and healing ointments.

In particular, we wish to bring them again many, many sleeping bags. As you may remember: Heiko – thanks to generous donations - took almost 150 of these warming cocoons there last year. But no villager knew how to use a sleeping bag – so he had a woven bed drawn on to an open square without further ado and push a giggling old lady into the bag – which was very funny to look at for everybody!

We hope indeed that the population can cope with severe cold weather with all these sleeping bags and many, many pairs of wool socks. Everybody is cheerfully hospitable here. They had made tea for us, and then they showed us their temple.

I had rarely experienced real existential fear before I entered that temple. It has been dangerously destroyed, and all memories of the earthquakes welled up in me again.

Despite its heavy destruction, the temple is still a holy room for the Buddhist Sherpas – who live in Sindhupalchowk among other ethnicities. It still is full of all the holy statues and books. They think it is more important to have a spiritual home somewhere than rebuild their own house as soon as possible. But they do risk their lives every time they enter the temple!

REBUILDING

Now you will ask yourselves – what about the rebuilding issues? A new problem has come our way that I wish to share with you:

The Government refuses to pay the victims the promised sum of 2,500 euros – because: They say our building drawing differs from that issued by the Government!

Our drawing provides for two rooms which are built in a quake-safe way. We wrote in a letter that the material costs alone amount to estimated 9,500 euros – at the current exchange rate.

The Government ratified a drawing, however, with a total house surface of 4 x 4 meters, which is 16 square meters for an entire family – in Nepal, this includes the mother, father, granny, grandpa and the children! And they want to use only one single reinforcing bar per column!! Everybody will agree that such a house cannot resist an earthquake.

So a house according to our drawings, where more steel is inserted in the concrete columns for security reasons, costs much more – as we want it to be larger than 16m² for families which at least comprise six members. If we cannot get the sums to be claimed by the victims, this means that the building project for 200 houses takes 500,000 euros more (the original number of 220 houses was no longer valid as people had already moved to other places).

You could despair ... The monsoon had already destroyed much so that the road to Sindhupalchowk was massively broken. It took weeks to make it fit for passing again to enable transports of building material in these far way regions – and now this problem! But we are ready to start the second stage of reconstruction: Qualified welders will weld the steel baskets for reinforcement, and the villagers will help with the preparing work, such as transport.

We want to make sure that the "dream village" comes true and is built safely and solidly! The money for this second building stage (initially) is still



there; and we hope that the Government will back down at last. It would be helpful if only some part of the money were paid out.

It is the forth winter that the people have to endure in their make-shift dwellings. What a psychological stress they are undergoing! We must not resign under such conditions in view of the problems we are confronted with. Nobody except you in Germany and we here in Nepal stands up for these people, granting financial and ideal aid.

ONE DOLLAR GLASSES

After I have seen and felt all this, I wish to help some more so that these suffering people can really get some help. They have so many needs! For example, some elder women complained that they cannot see well. But they are at severe risk in that mountainous, rocky region without any roads or bridges.

Which makes me deeply thankful that we were able to help them! This time, I had in my airplane luggage a case with 800 (eight hundred) eyeglass frames, and besides that the corresponding eyeglasses of sizes of minus six to plus six dioptres. They are the result of the amazing "One Dollar Glasses" project. Former German schoolteacher Stephan Aufmuth developed steel wire glasses with a click system which can be adapted individually. I am just wearing such one-dollar glasses, which is light as a feather and costs a total amount of 2.50 euros including the two glasses.

We wish to organize a health camp where the population can be examined for eye, tooth and general health problems. Action medeor has rather painstakingly assembled medical cases for this purpose, including instruments, medicine etc. - and now the amazing glasses to be distributed! Thank you so much that you have enabled us to be so helpful with your generosity!

IN THE CENTER

Currently, the atmosphere was happy and festive in the Center. We approached Tihar the big festival of lights. The Shanti children had laid out a beautiful mandala made from colored powder in the inner square.

We are full of joy if we can have a party in the Shanti family. This will help – hopefully – to solace people over their sorrows because they long for their original families on such festivity days, but nobody from the family will invite them home. It is a real mental hardship on such party days to be an untouchable and outcast.

Bijendra, our Junior Manager, who grew up with Shanti, ensures, with loving sensitivity every year that all Shanti members are blessed and get the red point pressed on the front, the "tikka", as it is the custom on Tihar. This makes us happy!

But we have another reason to be happy: our hard-working Dibika got the results of her final nurse examination: She shows us her certificate proud and happy, achieving a result of 93.47%! Happy about this, we immediately employed her in our medical center. Her college will celebrate this in a special party for her, later!

She already wished to become a nurse since childhood. But her destitute parents were unable to pay for her education. Such a study program costs, depending on the college, between four and five thousand euros here in Nepal. Only some humane sponsors can make the dream of such talented young students come true. Thank you for this!

We also expect another big joy: the space for disabled children is rare. Their house in Buddhanilkantha was destroyed during the earthquake.



Finally, Heiko was able to start the development of two rooms and a toilet for disabled persons after so many problems with the authorities! Some hard-working volunteers help him with this task. In two months' time, the children can move there, hopefully.

Laxmi will go with them. She was given us around four weeks ago. Her father died, and the new husband of her mother did not allow the "Wheelchair child" to live in his house. This would have brought the "Curse of the Gods" over the house ...

A village chief brought us the friendly 13-year old from Mustang. She longs to go to school! Since she has not attended any school, we wish to initially tutor her individually until she is capable of joining a class.

And something else, the entire Shanti family is happy about: Kumar, our silver smith, who is always pleasant, but paralyzed, married some time ago, and the couple have a small son.

WISHES FOR PEACE

In November, we had some painful memorial days in Germany, and looking into our society and so many countries outside Germany, outside Europe, we are aware with pain: Peace is a long distance away.

This is why we send all of you a peace dove for Christmas with this Letter. "Shanti" is a word for "Peace", and we wish to invite peace to come into our house again and again. I thank you all from my heart that you lend us a little help to our efforts!

The entire Shanti family wishes you and us all that light may shine into all darkness, peace on earth may reign in the environment we are living in, and may God guide us into the New Year!

Yours

Marianne Grosspietsch