

SUMMER
2019



SHANTI LEPROSILFPE
DORTMUND E.V.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUED IN SUMMER 2019

A ROADSIDE FLOWER

A MALLOW BLOOMING ON THE ROADSIDE

ONE BUD ALMOST OPEN

IT WILL HAVE AN OLD ROSE COLOUR

PERHAPS TOMORROW

IF I WERE PATIENT

I COULD WAIT

IF I PAID ATTENTION

I WOULD FREEZE AND STAY

IF I WERE PIOUS

I WOULD BEND MY KNEE

AND I COULD SEE

PERHAPS TOMORROW

NOT ONLY IMAGINE

THAT ANOTHER CO-BEING SUCCEEDS

IN BLOOM

ON THE ROADSIDE

Dorothee Sölle

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,

It has been a while since brightly coloured post-cards were put in the mailbox in the summer, telling of gaily spent holidays. Today, this is no longer "cool" in the wake of WhatsApp and emails.

But I wish to follow the tradition and send you a multicolour bouquet of flowers with our news from the Shanti Family.

What a contrast I saw when I returned from Nepal a week ago!



Here, everybody prepared for their holiday journeys, the streets were filled with people playing on the piano and small groups of musicians in the pedestrian precinct of Dortmund, a wine festival and a gourmet food event were going on, children had a school holiday party and the markets were abound in colours.

Whereas in Nepal, all looks went to the skies: When would the endlessly pouring rain finally stop? People responded anxiously to reports from flooded areas in the south, landslides in the mountains, warnings that cholera and typhoid fever, the so-called "waterborne diseases" would break out because of the contaminated water.

I am deeply grateful that our Centre is located in a privileged area: although we are near the holy river of Bagmati, our altitude is high enough that high waters cannot reach us - and the Bagmati is now being flooded.

We were able to bundle forces and continue alleviating the distress which is a daily challenge to us. The problems are as diversified as there are human fates.

RUBI DEVI

Just think of Rubi Devi with her illness, who had the sympathy of us all. She has been suffering from the autoimmunity disease of Lupus erythematosus. The only 30-year-old mother of three daughters was in pain from sudden rheumatic fits. She also has two gashing wounds on her belly. She lives in the slum in our neighbourhood with her family.

The slum inhabitants collect huge quantities of plastic waste, sort it and sell it to recycling companies for a shockingly small amount of money. Her neighbours had collected money in the small shops around them - many tiny sums mounting up

to around 60 euros for her. This would enable her to get some medicine against her pain.

And this collection of money also resulted in Bijendra, our Junior Manager, having her attention drawn to her, resulting in her taking the woman to our clinic. The villagers of the slums did not dare to come to our clinic before; they come from the south of Nepal, their ethnic tribe being very unpopular. They did not even know that we give out treatment for free. The fear of leprosy was another reason.

So, our doctor cared for her wounds and tried to convince the woman to stay in our clinic for a first time. But unsuccessfully! Her husband, an aggressive man, came and pulled her back to the slums. When he continued beating the clinic staff, our security people pushed him out, banning him from ever entering the premises again.

They bitterly fought about the 60 euros - which he requested for himself! The woman did not hand them over, and he disappeared in full rage - hopefully to never come again...

The rain has made the slum a broad desert of mud for the time being. Rubi is living in a corrugated iron shed together with her children. The roof was leaking; only one single wobbling bed for all four of them was inside it. Remember that her drunkard husband lived here, too, just a while ago. The bed had no mattress, only cardboard was put on it.

I could not forget the misery in the small shed, and so I went to the slum, accompanied by Tikka, a competent young high school graduate who is keen to study social work, and Sunita, our textile work teacher, as well as Maria and Milena, two volunteers from Germany.



The dark and dirty shed appalled all of us, we found no words. How is it possible that people must live that way...?

We did not flee from this horror, but we thought – together with Rubi! – how we could help her in a most lasting manner. We were now joined by Dipika, our nurse. All the helpers went about the task quickly and efficiently. They took everything out of the shed. Some Shanti youths levelled the muddy, gooey floor and laid out some bricks from our classroom extension project. The next layer was some floorboards, and finally a plastic mat on the now dry floor.

The shabby bed fully broke when we took it outside; we replaced it with a new, solid one. We put thick foam mattress on it, and a colourfully striped blanket made from the patchwork squares our grannies have woven with hard work.

When I returned in the evening to see how the helpers had been doing, I entered a dark shed. There was only a small, but dangerous cooking fire in the dark room. But I knew that there were some solar lamps in my room, together with the matching panels. I walked back through the mud and rain and got some solar lamps – for Rubi and for her neighbours.

It was a joy to see these people with their eyes as bright as the lamps! After the great earthquake in 2015, such a lamp had brightened up our days in the tent during many nights. It helped to prevent us from accidentally stepping on the other tent inhabitants in the dark...

From those earthquake days, we also still had some waterproof tarpaulins a German DIY company had sent us. We put it on her shed, and the shed of her direct neighbours was covered, too.

The flames in the shed had made me panic – they are open fire and really dangerous, so I invited Rubi and her daughters to eat with us at Shanti.

Everybody enjoyed the meal, and she is now the owner of a mess kit, a tin container you can put together as a tower, like those the mine workers' have used in the mines for their meals in Dortmund in former times. The children now get meals from our Shanti kitchen every day so they would not have to make an open fire in the shed any more.

As Rubi and her children were here at Shanti at last, we took their measurements in our tailors' shop and - they were invited to choose a cotton fabric for new clothes!

Clothing they had selected themselves, not having to rescue it from the waste, old second-hand clothes. They were so happy - and this made me send you all these grateful thoughts – to you, who enable us to make people happy!

KUSSUM

I had similar happy thoughts when I now saw Kussum and her Shanti girlfriends. One of our first Shanti patients, Hari, brought her to us in May. The little one looked at us fearfully, her eyes large and wide. She had been pushed around so much – our heart went out to her when Hari told us her story.

Kussum was born out of wedlock in a village. But a mother with an illegitimate child is regarded a sinner in the Nepalese culture, so she was cast out of the village community. Now, a single woman is regarded a prostitute so she married the first man she met, who was an aggressive drunkard. He beat her again and again, until she left him in the dark night in her despair. Unfortunately, Kussum was left with him. But he refused to raise the child of another person.



A compassionate neighbour wanted to care for her. But as his wife vehemently refused this, she asked him to throw the child out of her house. Hari lived next door. He noticed all the misery and took the child to Shanti.

I flew back to Germany with the impression of a deeply sad child in my mind. What a joy to see now, in July, that the little girls have accepted Kussum in their circle! They gave her a small feeling of security. Kussum's face now looks much more relaxed and she can even laugh sometimes!

PRESERVING CREATION

Our letter is sent from Dortmund, and many of you may have heard of the great event in June, the Church Congress, which became a cheerful festival. More than 100,000 people attended the party under a bright blue sky and we were able to tell them about the work we do, in this „market of chances“. Friends helped us in shift work, Herbert and Puskal installed our stand, decorating it with a sky of peace doves which you know from our Christmas letter.

Our hall had the task to show the multiple possibilities of how people can live together in greater fairness and humanity. The large hall next to us had the subject of maintaining nature and chances of avoiding the reckless exploiting of our Earth.

Whenever I talked about Shanti I realized what the young people of the „Fridays For Future“ movement had in mind, was exactly the same we had in mind at Shanti!, we have tried to work in a climate-preserving way for many years.

Our patients, for example, produce organic bricks from the shredded documents of the German Embassy and of other diplomatic missions. These bricks contribute to preserve our mountains from

being divested of trees, thus avoiding the destructive effect of this deforesting. Unfortunately, there was a political conflict with India after the earthquake four years ago, on top of that. Because of the conflict, the borders to India were closed for a few months, with the result that nobody had gas and petrol for cooking. What was left for them to do than fell a huge number of trees to have some energy for cooking their meals. This then led to disastrous landslides whenever the monsoon got a little heavier.

UPCYCLING

Not only bricks, but many more useful things are made from waste by our wonderfully gifted craftsmen and craftswomen.

We can save money, and they gain a little more quality of life: school satchels and bags from rice sacks, which they have reinforced with pieces of car tyre rubber; purses made from bicycle tyres and old embroidery; dolls houses and children's bricks from the remaining wood blocks; stools and benches made from plastic bottles (which are not collected for recycling in Nepal!), combining them with waste wood, foam and car tyre; mats from bits of textile; and paper bags from newspapers - many more ideas arise, and new products are created again and again ...

„UPGRADING“

All of a sudden, I thought of a comparison which has been a source of my latest inspiration since then: „Upcycling“ – this means nothing else than: „Improving the value“, „Upgrading something“ – exactly what we do at Shanti not only with the materials that are being sorted out, but in the first place with people who were „sorted out“ by society. Cast out because they have leprosy or are in other way disabled. Now they belong to the life community of the Shanti Family where they can learn to



be valued and learn to be "upgraded". They have a chance of valuing themselves again and to enjoy their lives.

In the protective workshops of Shanti, they can develop their talents which were long buried; they see the success of their work, earning their living for themselves and their children at the same time.

In this context, it is important to mention Shanti's school and the children's education. Many of them have graduated with excellent marks to enable them to go to college afterwards. Children become academics, although their parents are still illiterate! What a wonderful step into a successful life, and a life where they are no longer sorted out by society!

We have great reasons for being especially happy this year: Twelve (!) successful graduates from school wish to study: they want to be nurses (this is a study program in Nepal), pharmacists and social workers. One girl wants to be an engineer.

As their exam results were very good, the colleges have given us a discount of 50% off the fees but the college programs still cost between 3,000 and 5,000 euros per student for a period of three years. This means the financing is another problem. But

we are basically very happy for the young students and their families, and we are grateful for their success. Of course, we do not wish to leave anybody alone just for financial reasons.

FOOTBALL!

Something else drove our Shanti Family to triumphant cheers: Our football team won three times in a row against the teams of some rich private schools! With their amazing energy that young boys have, they trained intensively with their trainer - one of the "older ones" of the Shanti Family - the goal difference was impressive!

So, we had a lot of fun, and we rewarded them with freshly baked banana pancakes!

Now I wish you a summer full of many occasions for being happy and grateful - and I would like to thank you again from all my heart because you do things which enable us to give a large number of people the courage to live and a joy of life!

Stay protected!

Yours

Marianne Grosspietsch