

SUMMER
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SHANTI LEPRAHILFE
DORTMUND E.V.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUED SUMMER 2024

SURVIVAL MODEL

Amidst such different neighbours
you keep your leaves high up
gently swinging in the wind
twelve dusty leaves remain
how many have you lost
brave plant?
You bloom in soft pastel lilac
maybe waiting for the rain
to wash the dust off your surface.
And at your stem
you dare to grow new leaves
regardless of your naked stem
showing so many scars of those of those you lost
in the process of becoming what I see in you now.
Inspire me, dear plant, to struggle as courageously
as you do.

(Author unknown)

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE SHANTI-FAMILY,

It is still summer while I am writing to you, and as every year, most people seem to enjoy their holidays, the long daylight, warm evenings outside – appearing to have no worries at all.

But our lives have become different in a way, don't you think? The wars, pictures of destruction and pain and misery - they leave many of us feeling full of fear and helplessness. Not to forget the climate

change and its effects on us and so many parts of the world - these are things which make us worry.

Is it really easy to live every day happily, with nothing to worry, to trust, to be happy and to attack things with expectation like we did before? As if nothing had changed?

These are my thoughts while I wish to give you some grain of hope - I only have to take you with me to Nepal to do so, to our Shanti family.



CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Nepal is terribly affected by the climate change: harvests are drying and dying, fires are breaking out because of the long droughts, and then the landslides caused by heavy monsoon rainfall.

This year alone, more people have died in Nepal than three years ago in Germany in the Ahr valley. Two buses with a total of 58 passengers fell into the Trishuli river, and only 17 were found. Nobody survived the crashes. The buses and the other passengers were never found (even some German newlines broadcast this!).

What the climate change brings us, are increasingly higher prices, famines and homelessness for many people.

At Shanti, everyone feels at home and safe. They feel deep empathy for the misery of all those who are directly affected by the disasters, and are motivated to provide some help.

Again and again, they join us on a sometimes difficult journey in order to do something to change the misery, to lend some help in every possible way.

Life in Nepal is getting more and more unbearable, burdening the poor with ever heavier loads. Any help is welcome to these people, as an encouragement and consolation. Everybody needs some solace whenever our lives happen to be bumpy. I remember two of my old girlfriends. They gave me a generous donation when sorrows were plaguing me - and a long-stemmed rose! A card was hanging from it: "Only a rose as a support..." (taken from a poem by Hilde Domin). Both of these women passed away a long time ago. But I sometimes still remember their loving consoling gesture.

THE GOVERNMENT

We can expect no help from the government in the current situation. They have so much to do with themselves - again. In early July, there was an-other putsch. The Maoists were holding on to power with all their might, but they had to leave it to the Communists. Any help for the poor is nowhere to be seen - they mostly include the "untouchable" Dalits, while the government only consists of people from the highest castes.

DENISSA

But now let us talk about the most enjoyable news of the last few weeks: Denissa, two years old, who worried us a lot, has overcome four pneumonias of a severe type, and she got a new heart valve in non-invasive surgery, with success!

You recall what I told you about her: Her drinking father (her mother died long ago) had lent her to beggars at 1.50 euros per day. There she was, crawling about in the dirt among the exhausts of motorcycles and cars, triggering the pity of the people passing in order to fill the beggars' bowls faster. Her delicate lungs were massively damaged by this. Her father needed the 1.50 euros for alcohol.

We feared so much that she would not live through this! Now everybody is so happy - even our small boys love her and carry her around.

During the day, our housemother Mito takes Denissa home to her own family, and brings her back when she comes to work in the afternoon in our orphans' home (where Mito sleeps with the children at night). The little child can live among a huge crowd of children, at the same time getting so much love in Mito's family. Two other teenagers are living there, they both love Denissa, and Mito's husband has also much fun with the child.



It is a real wonder that Denissa could make it; we hope that her lungs will be healthy soon. She will never again be lent to beggars in order to gain people's compassion! Our busy lawyer has convinced the authorities that the girl be never again sent back to her father. When she only notices him, she clings to Mito and cries, smelling the alcohol on him. They granted Shanti the right to keep her.

I am so thankful that so many of you have helped to bear the costs of Denissa's stays in the intensive care unit and the lawyer's fees, too!

This really makes me wonder, such a nice surprise! I am so happy that miracles still happen in our world which has become so rough: The fate of a tiny, dying little girl from a slum in Nepal touches people in a country far away, in Germany, who provide the money so that the child can be treated in a hospital! This gives us courage – beautiful evidence of solidarity!

I immediately think of a book written by Rutger Bregman, a historian and journalist, who wrote that people are "good at heart" – which is the title of his book on how people really are.

LALSARA

In my last letter, I told the story of the six children who were operated on by an American team of surgeons. Uttam Niraula wishes to tell you a little more about one of these children. Uttam is a member of the board of management of Shanti Sewa Griha in Nepal and also a university professor of human rights:

„I am writing to share the extraordinary story of Lalsara Rokaya, a resilient 13-year-old girl from the remote Humla district of Nepal. Lalsara's journey has been fraught with hardship. Living in a district untouched by roads, she fell from her front yard to

a cliff while she was a baby, breaking her leg in the process. The local shaman tried to help by placing a wooden support on her leg, tying it tightly.

Unfortunately, this only worsened her condition. Due to the remote location and the distance to the nearest hospital, she did not receive immediate medical attention. By the time it was discovered, her foot was barely attached, hanging only by nerves. The difficult decision was made to amputate her foot.

Left at home by her parents, who saw her as a burden because she could neither help with physical work nor attend school due to her condition, Lalsara's future seemed bleak.

When Shanti Sewa Griha's staff found her at the age of 12, she was living in a hut-like house, abandoned and without hope. Her parents' despair stemmed from her inability to contribute physically and the impossibility of her climbing the high hill to reach school. Moved by her plight, our dedicated team at Shanti Sewa Griha rescued Lalsara and brought her to Kathmandu for further treatment. Thanks to your invaluable contributions, she underwent rigorous medical care.

Today, she can walk again using prosthetic legs. The joy and disbelief in her eyes when she took her first steps were indescribable. Lalsara never imagined she would be able to walk by herself again, but your support made this miracle possible. Shanti Sewa Griha will continue to care for Lalsara, ensuring she receives the education and health-care she needs. With your kindness, she now has a chance at a brighter future, filled with opportunities she once thought impossible. Shanti's support has given Lalsara the ability to walk and a renewed sense of hope and purpose. She can now dream of a future where she can stand tall and strong."



MEDICAL PROFESSIONS

I have another reason to be very happy right now: our nurse Dipika graduated from her midwife training as the second best student! She has to undergo a practical training session for another three months, and then she can be registered as a midwife.

In Nepal, colleges are mainly private institutions so that only wealthy families can send their children there for education. We are horrified again and again how high the fees for these colleges are for those young students. Dipika's training to become a nurse and now midwife has cost 10,000 euros, all in all – this is a huge sum in a country where a worker earns a mere 117 euros per month as a minimum wage at the time being!

You can imagine that the young women at Shanti are the ones who are the most grateful that there are some generous people in Germany who change their situation so meaningfully: from an uneducated, discriminated, untouchable Dalith, they gain respect through their training and their competence as a nurse!

What is more, they earn good money after their training and can support their families – which makes them so happy and gives them a good reputation. At the moment, there is Sunita here at Shanti who is training as a paediatric nurse, and Aruna as a trainee nurse. Many of our medically interested college students wish to work in pharmacies, laboratories and physiotherapeutic surgeries later on.

HEALTH CAMPS

The medical professions are very important in Nepal as the villagers in many regions do not have any health centres where they can get help. This

is something we notice with much pain when we work in our health camps in some more remote villages.

We here in Germany cannot imagine the situation: people looking for help must walk for many hours up and down mountains to find help. Mothers carry their babies in baskets on their backs. Nobody has real hiking shoes; some simple flip-flops are all they have. They cannot afford the price of robust, protecting shoes.

After the exhausting walk there, about 500 patients are waiting there every day to get some treatment – with a patience we can only dream of: Children and elderly people, workworn mothers, powered-out men ... but nobody tries to skip the queue, nobody argues. They gently talk to each other, look at the European faces of the volunteers with awe, at the medical equipment, medicine, mountains of lito (lentil mush) for undernourished children ...

Sometimes they give us touching gifts as a way of thanks: a plastic bottle full of honey from wild bees, a chicken or a hand-woven basket – and always the plea: „Please, come again soon! We need your help so much!“

I have just ordered another lot of one-dollar glasses, including the lenses sets from minus six to plus six dioptries. You should have seen the incredible looks of the patients when they are able to see sharply again! They put one of the ingenious wire sets on their noses, where the glasses can be clicked into, for everyone to admire and giggle about! For the team, it is always an effort to make these health camps work, it comes back very tired, but contented – both our Shanti team and the German volunteers, who often join them on their journey. It is a good thing to be able to help in so many ways – both sides feel this pleasure.



PLANTING THE FRUIT TREES

Now something about our favourite project, with which our hopes also grow - our campaign to plant fruit trees! The monsoon has brought so much water rushing down this year that many important connecting roads between India and Nepal have become impassable. The fruits and vegetables imported from India have declined in quantity. This again lets the prices rise by 100 per cent sometimes, and who of the poor can pay this?

We wish to help the villagers to sustain themselves a little to become more independent from the Indian fruits and vegetables. Trees have two advantages: they give nutrition, and they hold back the soil, preventing landslides. Last year, we gave many fruit trees to some poor families in the Dalith villages. This has led to an incredible wave of enthusiasm and gratefulness – which has really surprised us! Dozens of volunteers have helped with the planting: Shanti employees, villagers, our students and pupils – for our many volunteers, it is a special experience. Everybody was motivated enough as the trees of last year are already bearing their first fruits; they were three metres high when we planted them!

These trees are not only being planted in the Kathmandu valley, but also in the remote villages which maintain contact with Shanti. With happy enthusiasm and hard-working attitude the helpers put impressive quantities of mango and peach trees, pears and pomegranates, guava and lychee trees into the planting holes which had been prepared and filled with cow manure to support a successful growth. The recipients of these trees happily built protective cages around their trees using bamboo rods to prevent the goats from eating them. Besides the fruit trees they also planted avocado and jackfruit trees. The fact that these types of trees can grow in Nepal makes us happy

because the increasing famine worries us much. We think that the nutritious avocados and the heavy jackfruit of about one kilogram can be helpful. One jackfruit alone is a meal for many hungry stomachs. This tree grows wonderfully in Nepal, it belongs to the family of mulberry trees. You can eat its fruits and also its seeds.

Even in Europe people are starting to grow jackfruits, as there are many vegans who like to include this fruit whose flesh is like tender meat in their meals. The Nepalese cook a delicious curry with it. Our fruit trees are always a reason for hope for the poor. They give them new courage in life and pleasure at the same time. Therefore it was so important for these people that we come again, and reliably so.

Our goal was 5,000 trees this year, but we will plant much more. In our next letter, the Christmas letter, I can tell you how many in total! And that we are able to plant so many signs of hope everywhere – is a gift that you have given us, dear donors! This makes us resilient. Thank you very much for all this!

Martin Luther's motto strengthens us in our work. Rumour has it that he said: „If I knew that the world would come to an end tomorrow – I would plant an apple tree today!“ The trees have aroused so much hope in Nepal. This work may help us even in Germany to not let us despair by all that is so worrying around us, but give us courage that everyone can do something and enjoy doing it.

I wish you in the name of the entire Shanti family a nice late summer and autumn with a lot of living joy and courage!

Stay protected everyone!
Your Marianne Grosspietsch