

Ghar Sita Mutu - House With a Heart

A home for abandoned children, a training program for destitute women, and a support program for needy families in Kathmandu, Nepal

Summer 2010

I returned from Nepal in May as I still have visa restrictions. I continue to use my time in New York for fundraising and, of course, updating our supporters through this newsletter. I have also begun to blog our experiences at the House and in Kathmandu. You can find the blog at: <http://gharsitamutu.wordpress.com>.

Getting out of Nepal this time took some creativity and assistance from a new Ghar Sita Mutu supporter and friend, **Shyam Dhaubadel, President of The Bhaktapur Rotary Club**. Political strife continues in Nepal that at times interferes with our ability to move freely outside Ghar Sita Mutu. Just as I was leaving, an indefinite strike was called that shut down all businesses and means of transportation. Shyam sent an ambulance to the House to take me to the airport. The plan worked smoothly and we took back roads to the airport early in the morning for an evening flight, as I had been warned that it would be unsafe to go any later in the day.



Krishna (dressed for sports day) and Sujita (dressed for a cultural program) head off for school.



The children study in the morning before leaving for school.

THE CHILDREN

The end-of-schoolyear holidays were hectic as usual. There were 27 children at the House including our former trainee Laxmi Sapkota's three children, our Kamala's three brothers, and the children of staff members Bimala and Dev Kala. That's a lot of children to keep engaged—and I wonder why I'm tired at night! But I am happy to make the best of their time off. For the most part, the kids work very hard when they are in school, so we like to make their time off fun and creative.

The children love to draw and paint, make up small plays, play instruments, sing and dance, and play sports. Due to security concerns, they spend most of their time either at school or at the House, so they particularly enjoy supervised daily walks.

We also celebrated little Maya's and little Rojina's birthday by cutting one cake into forty slices. Better a small piece than none at all, I say—and the kids agree.

The children had mixed results in school this year. I'm very pleased that Manu and Sujita made it into the top ten in their classes. Govinda has improved significantly both on an academic and behavior level. Karmala and Benita both passed their School Leaving Certificates, with plans to attend college. Some children continue to struggle, and we work hard to provide them with the special tutoring they require. They all started a new and more challenging school this past year, so I'm not overly concerned about the mixed results. Just like children who change schools in the West, they will need some time to adjust.

Along with our children, we are paying for another nine children to go to school. The schools have raised their fees again. The books are more expensive, and the school bus costs almost as much as the monthly tuition! I still dream of having a van of our own.

My boys are now adolescents and with a household full of blooming women, I thought it best to separate them, so I recently moved them into private rooms underneath our Learning Centre. They pitched in to make the space their own and are adjusting well. A staff member stays with them, and the security guard is posted right next door so they are well supervised. They, of course, are still very much a part of the family. They eat all meals in the House, participate in our family activities, and much to their disappointment, are still responsible for household chores.

We continue to search for any relatives of our children in order to find their birth certificates and their parents' death certificates. Both are needed in order for the children to be

THE CHILDREN (CONT.)

granted citizenship. Without it they have no rights, and many doors will be closed to them when they finish school. In Nepali society, children who have parents recorded as unknown are stigmatized and shamed.

We recently went around in circles trying to get our eldest, Benita, her birth certificate. Our lawyer went to Benita's village, Hetauda, along with Auntie (our children's supervisor) to show the villagers a picture of Benita's mother who had committed suicide six years ago. The villagers all pointed to one man and insisted that he was Benita's father. The village leaders were called in and the identified man had no choice but to put his name on the certificate. Good news, so we thought. Unfortunately, he later cast serious doubt on the villagers' claims that he was the father. Sadly, Benita did not get her citizenship.

We have made some progress, and did obtain citizenship for my first two, Krishna and Babu. Two down, many to go.



All of our children help with chores to keep the House running smoothly. Here Laxmi, one of our older girls, washes a blanket.

THE SHELLEY & DONALD RUBIN FOUNDATION

We are very excited to report that **The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation** has just awarded us \$15,000 in general support and \$1,000 for school and art supplies for our Children's Learning Centre. This means so much to our organization.

LAXMI & THE DOCTORS STRIKE

We took a former trainee, Laxmi Sapkota, and her three children into the House recently. Laxmi has been ill for quite some time as a result of a brain injury she suffered while working as a brick-carrying laborer. (In Nepal bricks are carried in a basket on the back supported by a head strap.) She had spent several months in the hospital, where her 14-year-old son looked after her. Her younger daughters fended for themselves at home.

After she moved into our House she collapsed. We took her to the hospital, where she had been treated in the past. Unbelievably, they turned her away because of a doctors strike. We turned to a clinic we use that is just up



Laxmi Sapkota with her three children, Gauri, Sabita and Navraj.

the road. There, Dr. Tenzin treated her with acupuncture and Tibetan medicine. He advised me to work with her on simple tasks to improve her condition, and I am pleased to report she is making progress. Despite the hardship her children have endured during this period, they continue to do well in school.

Many thanks to their sponsors **Kanani Titchen and Lou Seitchik** for their additional support at this time. Due to their kindness, Laxmi need no longer worry about money matters while she is recovering.

PARTNERSHIP WITH LOWER EAST SIDE GIRLS CLUB
Ghar Sita Mutu's collaboration with the **Lower East Side Girls Club** (LESGC) in New York City is going very well. Our girls are looking forward to exchanging letters and photos with their peers half way around the world. A club from Mexico will be in on the project as well.

Many thanks to **Lyn Pentecost**, the LESGC Executive Director, who worked with me to open a shop in their building, where girls club members are selling crafts made



Our Children's Learning Centre provides free schooling for children whose parents cannot afford to send them to school.

GIRLS CLUB (CONT.)

by the women in our training programs. To date they have sold \$1,000 worth of product. That money is reinvested in our skills training program for destitute women. Girls, your salesmanship is as impressive as it is appreciated!

INTERNATIONAL ROTARY SUPPORT

After the robbery at the House late last year, I asked the **Corning, NY Rotary** for financial assistance to install an electric-powered alarm system, fortify our existing security wall, and install panic buttons. Much to our delight, they have agreed to fund us—hopefully at the national level as well—with the caveat that I find a local club to sponsor our request. Good news on that front. The president of the **Bhaktapur Rotary Club, Mr. Shyam Dhaubadel**, paid us a visit and has agreed to help. We are working on a formal grant request. I cannot tell you what a relief it is to all of us that we will soon be protected by a 24-7 security system.

Robbery update: Three of the 20 robbers were apprehended, and we are pressing charges. We were told there were twelve robberies in our area that month. Neither the cash nor the goods were recovered.

SOLAR POWER

Many thanks to **Dr. Branka Perrottelli** and **Pasquale Daponte**, both from Italy, for obtaining the funding and coordinating the installation of a back-up solar system for the House and security system. A solar engineer has visited the House to prepare an estimate, and we are so pleased this project is well underway. With the constant and extended power outages we experience here, along with the lack of water heaters, we continue to make self-sufficiency and sustainability a priority.

VISITORS

We had a terrific two-week visit from a dedicated group of volunteers who make up the **Dynamic Heart Project** (www.dynamicheartproject.com). They worked with our children and several other groups in Nepal to help participants heal psychologically through Dynamic Theatre, a spontaneous and intuitive drama program. Our kids loved it and were completely engaged in the process. They have also done a significant amount of fundraising for us, and we are so grateful for their support. Thank you, Dynamic Heart!



Our children loved working with volunteers from the Dynamic Heart Project, a group that works towards healing traumatized people through participation in theatre arts.

Maura Moynihan, a representative from **The Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation** came for a tour of the House and our programs. We were so pleased to have her visit.

Noel Uncle (Faulkner) made his yearly sojourn to the House and spent his usual month with us. I am so grateful to Noel who gave me \$5,000 ten years ago to help with start-up costs. His support is never-ending and the children love him dearly. He entertains the kids with his outrageous sense of humor, teaches them the ukulele, and is a great sounding board for me.



Liz Andrews (pictured, left) and Bill Andrews represented us at the Global Activism Expo in Chicago.

MANY THANKS TO...

A special thank you to **Bill and Liz Andrews**, who represented us at the **Global Activism Expo** held in Chicago this past April. The expo was sponsored by **Chicago Public Radio's Worldview** program and brought 2,600 people out to learn about grassroots efforts, such as our own, that are dedicated to making positive change in the world. Welcome to all of our new Chicago friends who visited the booth!

I can't imagine what our programming would be like without the generosity of **David and Donna Joss** whose longtime support has played such a critical part in our organization.

I am grateful to **Fred Uncle (Ripley)** for his ongoing support. The note accompanying his most recent donation said, "be frivolous." I took his direction to heart and bought 27 pairs of new shoes for outings instead of sensible plastic shoes for everyday wear. Additionally, the kids have enjoyed some ice cream treats and trips to the swimming pool.

Colleen Auntie and her brother **Bill Boland** have earmarked donations from their fundraisers for power improvements, including solar power. We spent \$300 on an inverter that provides us with one light per room (for a few hours) during power outages—a very helpful improvement. We haven't retired our candles quite yet but we are making inroads one improvement at a time.

Ghar Sita Mutu
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We're updating our
website frequently.
Check it out!
www.GharSitaMutu.org



Coordination of printing and distribution
of the newsletter is courtesy of Bryn
Benson and the Lake Forest College
Visual Communications Department.

MANY THANKS (CONT.)

Thank you to **Kenny Kenny** for donating from the proceeds of his recent photography exhibit and for his continued support and encouragement.

I am grateful to **Bryn Benson** and her son **Ian Iyanger** for their support and enthusiasm, and for holding their annual fundraiser at the **Curry Hut** in Highwood, IL. They also coordinate the printing and distributing the newsletter, which is such a big help to us.

Many thanks to **Bill and Dorothy Boera** for their continued support.

Here is how you can help

*Ghar Sita Mutu relies on the generosity of friends like you. All donations are **tax deductible** and go directly toward running and expanding our programs.*

*Please make all checks payable to our fiscal sponsor:
The Candy Jernigan Foundation for the Arts
and note "Ghar Sita Mutu" on your check.*

*Mail checks to:
Ghar Sita Mutu
P.O. Box 152
New York, NY 10113*

You can also give online at www.GharSitaMutu.org

Thank you!

For more information, call Beverly at 212-529-0832.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND



Babu & Krishna, ages 2 & 5

My name is Beverly Bronson. I own a small antique shop called A Repeat Performance in New York City. In 1999 while working as a volunteer in Nepal, I found two abandoned children named Babu and Krishna, ages two and five. After searching for a loving home for them I had no choice but to put them in boarding school. Safe but bleak. The school appointed me as guardian and I went back to

New York with plans to raise money to establish a centre to house abandoned children and help destitute women.

With the help and generous support of Noel Faulkner and Dr. Mark Rodgers, who both made a long term commitment to help me raise the children and build a centre, I returned to Nepal with enough funds to rent a house. We opened Ghar Sita Mutu - House with a Heart in 2001 and have been expanding our outreach to the community every year. We moved into our own home in 2004. I split my time between New York and Nepal.