

May, 2009

I find that shortly before I leave for any trip, I have a feeling that I should not go, or question if what I am doing is the right thing. It was no different in leaving for Nepal this winter. This was a huge trip for me in so many ways. My family had some apprehension about me going this time. It was going to be hard to be away from Kolleen. Taking the winter term off had a lot attached to it. Leaving my job, and my coaching position created a lot of attention and questions in myself if I was doing the right thing. It seemed that my life had been picking up speed for some time and this was going to give me a chance to focus on one task and take a serious look at the things I wanted to keep in it, and those it was time to move on from.

On my flight home, I realized how valuable this trip had been for me. I knew things were going to change quickly on my return, but I am so happy that I went. I don't think I have ever accomplished so much while being there. Having Mark's support and management of Ten Friends at home and being free to make decisions and observe this place that I have come to love was an amazing experience. I learned so many things, and am so grateful for this opportunity.

In the past few years we have been in Nepal for both winter and summer. I cannot express how much that more consistent presence has done for the effect and understanding of our projects. Mark's visit last year really solidified the Kathmandu projects. The school sponsorships is such a solid program due to Mark and Dinesh's leg work. It is a sustainable program that is going to absolutely give those children opportunities that they never would have had otherwise. Honestly, this program would not have happened without Mark's tireless effort in working and communicating with Dinesh, searching for sponsors, and collecting endless donor's money. The Hopeful Home is also at a new level which would not have happened without Mark's attention last winter and summer and his effort to get the funds to assist their purchase of the existing facility. This will change the future of the 39 existing students and offer a beautiful location for future orphans of Kathmandu.

I hope my winter visit will also have the effect that we saw from Mark's time last year. We are going to be able to manufacture stretchers in Kathmandu, which will save us on shipping costs and put money into their economy. The Himalaya Teacher Training Center (HTTC) is now completely reliant on our support. We have taken the reins of this program and will hopefully stay in a close partnership with the original founders. I talk to Josh Brody each week and he is so excited with the Ten Friends involvement and the fact that the girls are going to continue their education and become teachers. We hope that someday we will be able to purchase a permanent home for the hostel in the Khandbari area so that we can continue to support the education and development of young women from the high mountains of the Himalayas.

I am so excited about the potential of our new focus on Village Vision Projects. I truly believe that our attention needs to turn to the rural regions of Nepal. Helping villages with sanitation, education, and libraries. I believe this attention will have the “upstream effect” that we dream of. With clean water, toilets, a school, books to read and their own teacher, there will be no need for the mountain people of Nepal to send their children to the dirty streets, cement rooms, filthy water orphanages of Kathmandu. These small children can live at home, learn from their family and village of their culture, be raised by their parents, and still have the quality of education that will allow them to leave the area if they choose to later in their life. It is a dream that I think we are getting closer to.

I believe that Ten Friends is starting to hit its stride. I think we need to keep our base level projects--the stretchers, filters, and sponsorships provide assistance needed for the many children that do not have an opportunity to go to school or drink clean water. But, now we are heading “upstream” to the cause of the problems. Too many children are sent to Kathmandu to go to a children’s home/orphanage because the education opportunities in the mountains are not adequate. Their parents dream of their children having a better life, and currently they feel that sending them at 5 to 7 years old to live in the city is their best chance. With our Village Vision, the children can be raised by their family and still have educational opportunities.

Rand