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July 2017

Newsletter No. 39

Dear friends,

Today you are receiving a newsletter penned by Ben Matern. In 2015, he was a volunteer in our home for five months and returned in April 2016 to continue his work. He has been in Nepal ever since.

It has been two years since the devastating earthquake in Nepal. Many Nepali people had to fight for their very survival in the rubble of their former homes. The extent of destruction was particularly disastrous in the villages. And apart from their literal losses, the fear of aftershocks, withholding of expected governmental help, the imminent monsoon season and the death toll cast a deep shadow on the Nepali's natural positive spirit.

Virtually everywhere in Kathmandu are still cracks and piles of rubble. Barely 5% of the destroyed homes are rebuilt, approximately 800,000 individuals and families had to spend a second winter without their own home. The damage is estimated to be nine billion US dollars, but due to extreme bureaucratic inertia, only 12% of international relief help has actually been distributed. Many families in the village regions are still expected to travel for days to the larger cities to contact the authorities about their plight. Others receive no information at all and are simply overwhelmed with the situation. In order to be able to receive relief money, the people need official documents such as a passport which many lack. There is construction underway everywhere but it's still a total mess without proper planning and infrastructure. For example, streets are dug up and renewed but only days later there are new potholes everywhere. So the street is dug up again. And again. And again. Energy, manpower and resources are wasted instead of using them efficiently.



After two years, the renovation of the Boudha stupa has been completed. It is finally accessible to the public again.

However, there is a glimmer of hope. For example, after the horrid petrol embargo following the earthquake aftermath (see Newsletter No. 36), there has been a drastic decrease in the number of enforced power cuts. Just two years ago, there were power cuts up to 18 hours every day (!), whereas now the whole Kathmandu valley has constant power with only very short cuts, sometimes lasting only a few minutes or one hour maximum. Sometimes there are a full 24 hours without any power cut. Additionally, for the first time in twenty years there have been local elections which have had a positive impact on earthquake relief efforts as the newly elected officials

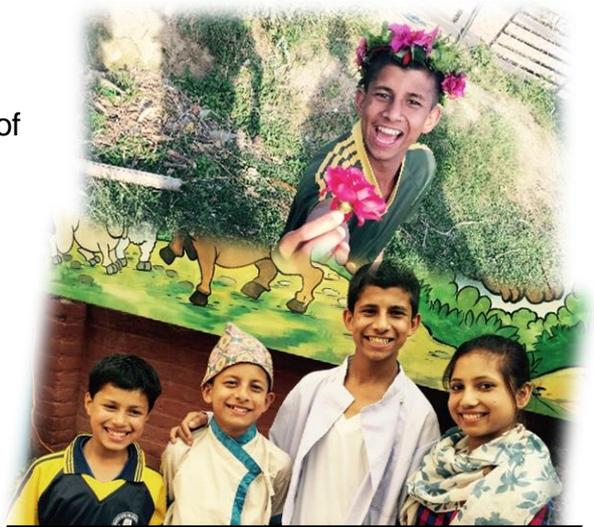
have independent authority to mobilize local resources (something Kathmandu has lacked so far). They are literally the voice of the people that is in a position to get the attention of the government. Particularly stunning was the fact that a 21-year-old young woman announced her candidacy for Kathmandu's mayor office. There are probably only very few who believed that she would actually get elected, but it is those young Nepali people who can actually make a difference in this country— young people who not only understand that things need to change, but who act and do something about it. And that's basically Self Help Nepal's mission: educating young people but also teaching them that they are indeed Nepal's future and that they are capable of helping their country develop.

In the midst of chaos, dust and the overwhelmed government, there is a crowd of happy children for whom the earthquake was just another traumatic experience in their past. And even now life's not always easy: The number of children in our home has increased to more than 150 and the daily routine needs to be strict so that there can even be a thing such as crowd control. School work is demanding to say the least and not everyone is able to get on well. For some, studying is not a challenge; others work hard but still bring home only bad grades. And of course, there is a difficult transition from being a carefree child to becoming an adolescent with regular teenage drama, or in other words: In some aspects, they are quite typical children and teenagers. Yet there is still something about them, a radiance in their smiles that I have never seen before anywhere in the world, something that elevates them above their difficult circumstances. Their eyes are firmly fixed on what lies ahead, not the past, because whatever happens, in the end Nepali people simply shrug their shoulders and say: "What to do?" Why whimper if you cannot change what happened. Move on and look to the future.

Let me share one example. Among the earthquake victims was Gokul, a beneficiary of our program who had built up his reputation as a travel guide (see Newsletter No. 35). His group also included his cousin Dharmaraj who had worked in India before but returned to Nepal to perform Hindu rituals on the first anniversary of his father's death. Gokul asked him to join in a trek as a porter to make some extra money, not knowing that this journey would be their last. Shortly before the earthquake stroke, both men left the group and returned to the village because Gokul wasn't feeling well. They wanted to get some rest when a landslide caused by the earthquake levelled the entire village to the ground. Dharmaraj's wife Sabitri was devastated: Not only had she lost her beloved husband, but also the family's provider. How would she ever make ends meet? Fortunately, we could immediately intervene and take in their two sons, ages 13 and 10. Subash, the older one, was barely able to find peace: his father was dead, his mother far away and he also felt responsible for his younger brother. During the first few weeks, he often burst into tears because the weight on his shoulders was too heavy. But he didn't fall into general depression, quite the opposite: because he had only visited a government school and lagged behind, he gave his best to catch up. It only took a day or two until he made new friends. If you look at him today, you do not only see a radiant boy, but someone who constantly cracks jokes and always tries to make others feel good. He thus reflects the Nepali mentality: the past is in the past; focus now on the future.

Of course, that doesn't mean that everything has been forgotten. Soon after my return to Nepal in April 2016, Subash and I talked in a quiet moment, and he suddenly asked: "Uncle, why did my father leave the trekking group before the earthquake? Why did he go back to the village?" I was shocked to realize that nobody ever told him the details about his father's death. And this is the downside of the Nepali attitude: Yes, the past is in the past, but no one ever mentions it again,

even though it's essential for the healing process. However, the good thing about our organization is taking this kind of Western knowledge and trying to implement it without robbing these wonderful people of their wonderful culture. Just a few days ago, Subash and I got to talk again in what I found an intensely beautiful dialogue. He said: "When I was new here, I was crying a lot." I told him that it's completely normal to mourn a terrible loss such as his. I then added that sometimes bad things happen, but good things come out of it. For example, his family's terrible tragedy made it possible for him and his brother to have a good education and the chance to provide for a family of their own someday. His eyes widened. "That's true," he said with a smile on his face.



A rather typical Subash moment: He is happy by nature, always up for fun. In the picture above, he is standing next to his brother Sagar. The two girls are from his village. We took in Prabita (left) and her two sisters a few months ago as well.

It is our hope that young people such as Subash can play a crucial role in the slow development of this country. We are grateful to be able to take care of these children and, in cooperation with the local house leadership, let them use their agency but also guide them a bit on their paths. Cultural differences are not making this exactly easy, but due to lots of communication, overcoming pride and exercising patience, it is possible indeed. [End of Ben's account.]

I want to thank all sponsors and donors for your support. Please keep the faith! On this newsletter's last page, we simply want to show you a few simple pictures from our children's everyday life. We are most grateful to guide and accompany them for at least a part of their journey.

If you live in the U.S. and want to support this organization you can do so by sending a check to the following American organization that is kind enough to transfer your contribution to our account in Nepal and to issue a tax refund slip to you.

Nepal Hope
38112 Young Dr
Fremont CA 94536.



Our addition to the family in April 2017

You can also make a contribution by using their web page www.nepalhope.org. Please specify our organization by stating „for SHN“ in both cases. „SHN“ stands for Self Help Nepal, the name of my organization in Nepal.

Ellen Dietrich

