

## Newsletter 2 2004

Hello to all of you!

It has been a while that you received a sign of life from me....but I am back in the little paradise of Sikkim since the 26th of October after having been away for a couple of months. (It is still the case that a foreigner can stay with a special permit for a maximum of 2 months at the time in Sikkim and then one has to leave for at least 3 months to be able to return).

In the meantime I have done a 3 month buddhist group retreat for purification in Dharamsala. In this retreat we had to recite the Vajrasattva mantra (a 100 syllable mantra) 100.000 times which brings about certain vibration in the subtle energy body which has a very strong purifying effect. Besides that did we do lots of prayers, visualisations, prostrations and many other buddhist practises. It has been absolutely worthwhile and makes that I feel that there is again more to give to the children of Sikkim. That is the main purpose of all those buddhist practises....to diminish the self cherishing and to develop compassion/ altruism more and more to really be able to benefit other sentient beings.

Anyway....back in the school and it is again wonderful! It is saturday afternoon, the children are playing outside and I am sitting outside with the laptop in my lap at the very far end of the school property, looking out over the surrounding green mountains covered with thick jungle. At this time of year lots of colorful flowers are blooming and the sun is shining everyday.....but the nights are cold with no central heating whatsoever.....

It is absolutely fantastic to be back and to see those happy shining faces everyday! Lots of children have grown big cheeks and some are growing considerably in length (some of them need a new schooluniform next year).

Tempa (12 years old) got a ball full in his face during a game of football and as a result lost one of his front teeth....such a shame... Palla our 60 year old cook bought a little pig and feeds it every day with the food leftover to grow it nice and fat so he can sell it with interest in the future!

The children planted lots of flower seeds around the school together with Premkit (schoolteacher) and lots of flowers are blooming abundantly right now which gives our place a lovely look. Also did we have vegetables from our own garden: 45 kg of cabbage, 22 kg of raddish and 6 kg of green beans. The children helped intensively with planting, weeding and harvesting! right now there is spinach, raddish and garlic in the garden.

The girls learned how to knit socks which is lovely....the look...what shall I say...somewhat 'different'....ha, ha!!

Our "cultural show" with traditional songs and dances (Nepali, Lepcha and some English) that the children started to perform at the beginning of the schoolyear is elaborated with more joyful songs and dances in more traditional dresses. the children obviously grow in their being at ease to perform for larger groups of people and it is beautiful to see their self confidence is growing. On the 15 th of August (Independence Day) there was a special celebration in the nearby government school and our kids were

invited to come and perform. The audience was very impressed by their good behaviour and their talents! The "band" started off with one guitar but now also has keyboards and a tamburine!

Several volunteers have been staying in the school to share their qualities and energy with the children. Here are some of their experiences written down in our 'volunteerbook'.

From Julia, England

I cannot believe I have to leave this place in two days, I feel like I'm being forcibly ejected by the powers that be, but my permit is maxed out so I must reluctantly drag myself away at the last possible moment.

I came here thinking I would teach for a month/ 5 weeks and travel around Sikkim for the rest of the time. I have ended up only missing about 6 schooldays for permit renewals and visits to other parts of Sikkim. I have loved every moment with my gorgeous S.H.A. family and will miss so much the hugs and kisses and shining faces, the eagerness to learn, the likes of which I have never encountered in an English school.

This place is different and special, I feel like I have got so much more than I have given. I have experienced so much generosity here and a welcome so complete that I now feel it is my home.

I sincerely hope that my legacy of art materials are put to good use (Namita, Premkit, GS (teachers): I have left an instructions booklet for all the activities we did. The kids here are so creative and there is some extremely strong ability which can be developed beyond drawing. I know it takes a bit of preparation for the teachers, pouring paint, laying down paper etc. but it is worth it, besides I am looking forward seeing the photos of what you have done!!

It is not just a school because there is love and respect here, between the children and the teachers, they look after one another and are considerate of each others needs. The older children look after the younger ones, basically what I am trying to say is they've got it right, it works and I hope it continues to do so.

So until next time, Julia Miss will be missing you all every day but with so many great times to remember from my 2 precious months here.

I will miss you all more than I can say, Julia

From Matthew , Zimbabwe/ UK

The Sikkim Himalayan Academy is an oasis of optimism, growing seeds of such fine potential, each nurtured with such care and compassion that the blossoms of creativity are already in full bloom. In my few days here, I have been mesmerized by the smiles and laughter that radiates from each individual. Your energy has recharged my hopes for humanity and generated great dreams for your shining future. Keep growing in the direction that you are and your dreams will come into fruition.

Thank you Sikkim Himalayan Academy, Mat

From Katherine, Canada

You guys have something incredibly special here in Bhuriakhop. My first night here, I watched in total awe as the students sang songs to me in three different languages and then proceeded to sing prayers in yet more different languages. In my seven weeks I have spent here at SHA since that first night, my sense of awe has only grown: this school offers its students the most well-rounded and multicultural education I can imagine. Other schools in other parts of the world may have fancier buildings, or higher-tech teaching tools but nowhere in the world can you find a school that excels more at the things that really matter: providing children with a loving, nurturing and positive environment for growing in mind, body and spirit.

I am humbled by the incredible devotion of the teachers at this school. You have spent 24 hours a day teaching, cleaning, nurturing, guiding, providing medical services too and playing with these children. This school simply would not be anything without your dedication.

I am equally humbled by the students at this school who are undoubtedly the most genuine, polite, loving, eager to learn and unspoiled children I've ever met. I'll never forget the time I watched one student spend at least ten full minutes trying to split the smallest little candy which had been given to him, so he could share it with all the other students. These kids take generosity to a whole new level.

You have all, teachers and students alike, taught and given me so much that when people ask me how I spent my summer, I will have to answer "I learned at a grade school in India" instead of "I taught at a grade school in India".

Thank you so much for letting me be a part of your family. I'll miss you all terribly.

Love and laughs, Katherine

From Vicky, England

I have greatly enjoyed sharing the life of SHA for the time I have been here and look forward to returning as soon as I can.

I admire the commitment and dedication of the staff who achieve so much with so little and teach strong skills with limited resources they have available. Not only do they teach academic skills but provide an education in qualities such as generosity and caring that will support the pupils in achieving a happy and secure future and values they in turn will pass to their families.

It is a joy to hear the children's shouts and laughter and see the smiles on their faces in response to life's simple pleasures: sweets, fruit and biscuits, running down the road, splashing in the stream. It makes a refreshing change after coming from an affluent culture where more is never enough and even young children compete to have the latest and greatest material items available.

I have greatly benefitted from this opportunity to take time out from my lifestyle and reflect and relax in everyway. Living with 30+ people and not just my husband, has been an amazing experience. I feel very welcomed and very loved by all here. It is impossible to stay sad or worried about something with so many precious hearts around in fact sometimes I feel my heart will burst

with the love that I have been given and feel from this wonderful group of people.

Take care everyone. You are in my heart and mind and this will keep me full with energy and inspiration until I see you again. Thank you for everything.  
Vicky

From Sammy, Australia

I think everyone who has written in this book has summed up the feeling of this place pretty well. It is an amazing feeling to love and be loved by 27 wonderful young people and to work with another incredibly devoted group of older people. I know that for me, words can't express things like: "Good morning Sir!", "Good morning Miss!", "Sir I can draw?" "Yes, Hissey, you can draw but not now".

Each one of these kids has their own wonderful personality and I shall miss them and hold them in my heart until the end of my days. I shall relate to my grandchildren or if I have none, to some children I meet on the street when I am a kakkarbaje and tell them stories of the Kindergarten, homework time, walks to see satellites at night and kung fu fighting.

It is a beautiful life here, only because of all the beautiful people. Love is all you need.

If you would like a copy of "Sikkim Himalayan Academy sings its greatest hits" please write to sammy\_riley@hotmail.com

Love, Thank you all for everything. It has been lovely!

Sammy

From Cathie, Australia

It is hard to know what to write, as it seems that it has already been said. I am very thankful for my time at SHA. I will miss the beautiful children and adults I have met here.

I will miss reading the paper with the children on the porch, Kunzankit singing "Tara, Tara", Hissey, Dicky and Dawa Lamu (6-7 years old) swinging their hips to the Bollywood tunes, "Miss, I can play skipp?", eating tea momo's and potatoes for breakfast, waking up at 5.30 am every day.....

Seriously, though I am thankful for every single moment I have had with these children as they have all been filled with love. It's nice to know that somewhere exist children unspoiled by hate, greed, money and power.

Thank you all for the experience!!

Cathie

From Antoine, France

It is difficult to find the right words to describe how life unfolds in Sikkim Himalayan Academy other than that the place is magical....but I will do my best.

First of all SHA is situated in the heart of a lush region with luxurious forest, its rivers and numerous vallies...the place has something like a paradise.

But even more extraordinary are the people who live there. Here, the children are real little treasures who give prove of a love and generosity without limits. They are simply adorable and I know already that I will miss them terribly. Teaching in a big foreign country wouldn't at all be easy but their eagerness to learn helped me.

As for the teachers that were always there to support me and gave me good advice. I would like to thank them for giving me the most pleasant stay possible.

Thank you to Jamyang for his kindness, warmth and advice, thanks you to Namita and Premkit for all their friendliness towards me, thank you to GS and Stephen for the most pleasant evenings with music and thank you to Palla and Tashi for their excellent meals which they incessantly prepared.

I hope that I will be able to get back one day even if I find another magical place like this where I can work.

I will miss you all incredibly!

Big kisses for all of you!!

Antoine

At the moment Magi is here, a very experienced teacher from England who we happen to know already for several years and who has come to Sikkim before. In England she is very active with fundraising, recruting volunteers with teaching experience, developing one of the English websites and many other supportive activities.

She is teaching classes, looks with an experienced eye at what is going on in Sikkim Himalayan Academy and trains the local teachers in a bit more modern style of teaching. She is very concerned about all that is going on in the school and her contribution is enormous!

Togheter we will have a look at all the schoolbooks to see what needs to be replaced and improved for the next schoolyear.

Well....this for now. We have great plans for the near future.....more about that soon!!

Thank you very much for all your enthusiasm and support! It has been great!!

Many blessings and much love from all of us!

Hedwig + kids and staff