

Dear Friends,

JANUARY 2010 NEWSLETTER

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Do you want to read the good news or the bad news first? Let me give you the bad news first and get it over with. A week before Christmas, my brother Naresh, who quit his job to help us with the driving, was driving back to Chris Niwas after dropping our children at our parish church for a pre-Christmas party. In one of the hairpin bends between our home and Kurseong, he met a big truck coming from the opposite side. The truck driver was driving way too fast – yes, even on a road like ours, there are some drivers who are crazy enough to drive their vehicles faster than our road allows them to!!! To save himself and the car from being hit, my brother went too close to the edge of the road. The road caved in and the car fell 500 feet down the hillside. Half way down, my brother was thrown out of the car, the impact left him with a broken left arm, broken left leg and a couple of major broken bones in the pelvis. We are so grateful to God that my brother came out alive from the accident. Just imagine if the accident had happened half an hour earlier when twelve of our children were packed in the car!!! Just the thought of it sends shivers down my spine. Our biggest worry now is how to get our children to school and back when school re-opens in mid-February. Without some means of transport, our children will have to walk 12 kilometers every day going to school and back home. The walking may be good for them during dry months but what about the monsoon season which lasts four months? Hiring a vehicle will cost us 10,800 rupees (\$263) every month and we just don't have that kind of funds. If you have a spare van lying in your garage, just put it in an envelope and mail it to us. If that was possible, I am sure many of you would do it happily. Please do pray for my brother who is getting better but is still in a lot of pain and discomfort. And also pray that some arrangement can be made for transport for our children before the school reopens.



Our little van – a gift from Dr. Laura and Harry – being pulled up from the gorge. People look at the van and wonder how my brother came out alive from the accident.

All our children did exceptionally well in their annual examination. Punam came first out of thirty-four students in her class and is promoted to Class 2. Sujan came third out of 42 students in his class and is promoted to Class 1. Namita, Priyanka, Abhinoy, Karan, Patrick, Apeksha, Diwakar, Alex, Wangden ranked among the top 15 in their classes. Even our little Andrew successfully completed his first year in school. Subani is the only one who 'failed' and will have to repeat Class 1 again. But as far as I am concerned, even Subani did as well as the other kids did. In the beginning of the year, she could not read and write properly. Now she can. The big thing is, Subani did not fall apart because she failed this exam. She is a hard worker. I know she will do much better this year and catch up with the other children. Because all the children had worked so hard and they all have been such wonderful children, we took them on a picnic to a park close to Siliguri. We all had a wonderful time. The day after the picnic, most of the children went home to spend a couple of weeks with their family. Chris Niwas is quiet without the children around.



(L) Suraj helps the younger ones play on the merry-go-round...and (R) Lunchtime



Treats like cream rolls, sweet buns and cup cakes.... some of the 'special' items we gave to the children

ASIDE: CHRIS NIWAS LOOTED

Something that just happened fifteen minutes back deserves an aside. I wish there was somebody with a video camera close by. The footage would surely have won the person an Oscar nomination for the "Funniest Amateur film" category. I am all by myself at home. I had to force Sashi to take a week off because for the last two years she has been working really hard taking care of our big family and next week all our fifteen children will return after which there



is no question of taking a break. So while Sashi and our two boys are in Siliguri, I am doing the housekeeping. I was in my room trying to complete this newsletter when I heard a strange noise in the kitchen. When I came out to check what it was, I witnessed a daytime robbery – not by humans but by a group of monkeys. There must have been at least a dozen of them. I tried to chase them away with bare hands, but they paid no heed. I came back to our room and picked up an umbrella. By the time I returned to the crime scene, half of the monkeys had run away with our vegetables. It was so funny to see two of the monkeys trying to drag the bag of potato up the stair. The other half were having problem deciding what to pick up before they fled. One of them picked up a container with dal (lentil). The other picked up a container with sugar and the third one picked up a jar of pickled chilly. I went after the monkeys hoping they would drop the

containers as they headed for the tree. But they all climbed up to the top of the tree with the containers. They emptied the lentil and sugar container in no time but threw the chilly container straight at me. Had I not been quick, I would have been bathed in chilly juice. I am not angry at the monkeys for breaking into Chris Niwas. We humans destroyed their habitat. They have no other option but to invade human territory. But I will make sure the door and windows of our kitchen are kept shut when people are not around. What I am worried about now is how to give account of the missing dal, sugar and vegetables when Sashi returns in a couple of days.

One problem with our kids going home to spend time with their parents is, we are not sure whether they will get enough to eat while they are at home. No doubt their family must be very excited to have them back in the house but they will have an extra hungry mouth to feed. Last year when the children came back after spending time with their families, most of them came back with health problems related to not having enough to eat. The month they spent with their



Sashi with Sujan's family



.....and with Subani's family

families cost us almost four months to get them back to good health. This time Sashi and I decided we would visit our children regularly in their homes and make sure they are getting enough to eat. So last Sunday, Sashi and I went down to their village. Of course we had carried with us enough rice, dal and sugar to give to the children's families to last them a couple of weeks. This was my first visit to the village since the last monsoon. It was devastating to see the destruction the river had caused to the village. Four homes had been washed away. The only bridge the villagers used to cross the river was also missing. Landslides had also destroyed the makeshift school the villagers had built for their children. Now the twenty-six children in the village have no school to go to. We have assured the thirteen families living in the village that we will try find the necessary funds to put up at least a temporary shed, which can be used as school for the children. The villagers will have to provide us with a plot of land and also the labour.



Sudhir with Punam's family



Two of the village children

My friends, Sashi and I are so grateful to God for all the gifts He has given us. Most of all we are grateful to Him for giving us friends who are so generous and are will to go out of their way to support us in our effort to continue helping the poor children. Because of your love and sacrifice we were able to give all our children a decent home to live in with enough food to eat and the opportunity to get education. We hope to provide this kind of help to more poor families during this year. Of course we cannot do this without your support. Give us the tools and we will do the job.

Gratefully yours,
Sudhir, Sashi and all our children