

MAY 2011 NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends,

What do you usually do on your wedding anniversary day? You will probably take your wife out to dinner; you buy each other a gift or maybe have a family celebration. Today, May 6th, is Sashi and mine 13th wedding anniversary. This morning at 5, I left Chris Niwas to be able to catch one of the first Land Rovers leaving from Manebhanjyag for Tumling. Last time I went up to Tumling, it was in a 57 years old vehicle, This time I got the honor of travelling in a more modern vehicle, which was **only** 53 years old. Only these vehicles can manage what-is-supposed-to-be-a-road going up to Tumling. The good thing is, after you've been on this road for five minutes, you loose all senses in the lower part of your anatomy. It's only when you hit a smooth patch that you feel the pain. Enough said about the road. All I wanted to say was the road is bad. What was I doing in Tumling on such a special day? Sashi and I thought this would be the best day to kick start our reforestation program. So while Sashi stayed back to take care of the kids, I came up to Tumling plant trees.



(L)Sudhir with Pemba, one of the workers involved with the fencing work. (R) Nila and Sudhir planting the first tree

The work of putting up a fence around the 80,000 square meters of land, where we want to start our reforestation program, was recently completed. The fence is absolutely animal proof. There is no way for cows, goats or wild boars can get inside the plantation area and destroy a single sapling we plant. Nila, who got the job done with support from the villagers and some of her relatives, is so farsighted. While some of them were working on the fencing, she had a couple of them working on a network of paths around the plantation area. She feels, once the saplings we plant grow into big trees, many people will want to come and have a look at the forest. For that reason, we need proper paths for people to walk around the forest. Besides trying to get the forest back as soon as possible, we would also like it to be a high altitude botanical garden focusing on 50 different breeds of indigenous rhododendron species. We planted the first 100 rhododendron saplings today besides 300 other saplings of trees that grow in high altitude places like Tumling.

We have enough room in the enclosure to plant 40,000 trees. We have approached many forest officials and have requested them to make available to us the saplings for our reforestation programs but I am afraid, by the time they untangle the red tape, we will have missed the planting season. So for this year we will have to buy all the 15,000 saplings we would like to plant in the next two months. Each sapling costs 25 rupees by the time it reaches Tumling. So, if there is anyone among you who would like to sponsor a few trees, you are most welcomed. The other activity we will take up as soon as we finish with tree planting is start a tree nursery so that we do not have to spend so much money on buying saplings for next year's planting.

Sashi and I have good news for all our friends who receive this newsletter. In honor of our 13th wedding anniversary, we bought you all a gift – a rhododendron tree in the Memorial Forest up at Tumling. I will go up to Tumling regularly and take good care of your tree. Someday when you come to visit us, we can trek up to Tumling and meet your tree.

Sudhir, Sashi, Andrew, Apeksha, Abhinoy, Anushree, Punam, Namita, Priyanka, Patrick, Subani, Sujan, Karan, Kiran, Diwakar, Wangchuk



(L) Villagers planting trees under Nila's supervision(R) Trekkers from Mumbai, who have been coming to Tumling since past eight years happy to see the reforestation work going on in Tumling.

(I am getting quite used to friends coming to visit us and adding their bit to my newsletters. Here is what Kathleen Lewanczuk and Dennis Lang, twin brother and sister, who visited Chris Niwas last month had to say about their experience.)

The Irish race are known for their greeting of over hundred thousand welcomes. Well, here in India at Chris Niwas, the "Welcome" we received is at least one million times more! It began on April 9, 2011, with 15 smiling faces, when we walked into the Bagdogra Airport. Lovely white silk scarves were placed around our necks along with fragrant marigold "malas" (garlands), as we were "welcomed" to India!



(L) Kathleen & Dennis and our children in traditional Nepali costumes (R) Kathleen sorting out the gifts

Upon entering their beautiful new home, Sashi blessed us with the traditional 'teeka', which is a sandalwood paste and rice grains, placed on the forehead as a blessing. I was completely overwhelmed by the solemnity of this beautiful and touching tradition.

Evenings were the highlights for me as we gathered for a half hour of family prayer before dinner. Although they all come from all religious backgrounds – Hindus, Buddhists and Christians (Sudhir and Sashi tell me they are waiting for the day when they can invite a Muslim child to join their family to make their family a complete family) – it was quite interesting for me to see them worshipping together. Besides getting enough to eat everyday and a decent place to live in, these children are learning not only to tolerate but also respect and accept each other's beliefs. They worship and sing in their Nepali language and one feels as though this is a little glimpse of heaven...

It brought to mind a quote of Anthony De Mello – "Behold the One beholding you and smiling". This family is steeped in the love and knowledge of our Creator. St. Ignatius of Loyola spoke of the task of "marinating in the God who is always greater". This family surely "marinates" in God daily! They also "love without



(L) Kathleen walks the children to school (R) Dennis and the boys in our flower garden

The poor do not have material goods to give, however, they do know how to share and spread peace, joy, happiness and love. (If I could bottle it to sell, I would become a millionaire overnight!) This family is so grateful for the simple things in life – love of one another, clean water, simple food, adequate shelter, a clean bed to sleep in at night, a small amount of clothing and shoes and the most desired treasure of all – education! These children know how to learn and study. To see them at 6 am and again at 5 pm for an hour in the study hall was somewhat mind boggling! They are disciplined and dedicated to achieving Honors in all their subjects.

And so our time with this wonderful and special family has almost come to an end. It will be so difficult to say ‘Fare thee well, until we meet again!’ Having experienced living and breaking bread with the poor my life has been forever changed, for the better!

Thank you dear Sashi and Sudhir and family for letting us into your lives. We received so much more than we could ever give... May the blessings of Our Lord be upon you, in full measure, always.

Kathleen



(L) Dennis plays ‘Kingsfisher’ with the boys and (R) Cleaning up after transplanting chrysanthemums

When my twin sister, Kathleen, asked me if I wanted to go with her to India, to spend time with Sudhir, Sashi and the children, I knew that it would be a trip of a lifetime and I had to seize the opportunity. I have gotten to know about Sudhir and Sashi and the work they are doing through Kathleen and the newsletters from Chris Niwas and I have been able to help them financially whenever someone from Canada has been going over to visit them. But the chance to actually see them, bring some gifts of money, tools, LED lights and other items was an exciting prospect. Then to be in Kurseong and spend ten days visiting with them and working on some projects while also still being a tourist made me realize that whatever I have given financially to them has not been much of a sacrifice on my part. However, how they can take that gift and multiply the benefits so that they can make a positive difference in the lives of the children they are caring for is remarkable. I have thoroughly enjoyed watching the children during their study time, visiting and playing games with them and seeing them with big smiles as they do their tasks, help keep the household running. Sudhir and Sashi are doing work that the Lord has laid upon their hearts and I have been so blessed to be a small part of it.

*God bless,
Dennis Lang*