

## Newsletter, Children of Sikkim March\April 2013

### Visit of Mieke and Jannie

In contrast with how we came back from last year's trip, euphoric about all successes, this trip proved itself difficult. But, in the end, it turned out great.



In Delhi we had an appointment with Robert Zimmerman from the Dutch Embassy. We also saw K.C.Pant of Rasta, an NGO that offered to help us with getting money into the country in a legal way, through their FCRA registration. Our aim to visit the embassy was not to get help in any way but more to get some information on rules and regulations and to tell them what we had been doing in India for the last 10 years. We learned that everything concerning visas and NGO's had become stricter. Last year 1/3 of all NGO's lost their FCRA registration (this means that they can't function anymore) and also travelling on a tourist visa while visiting projects had become very difficult. We were warned.



### RASTA

Our meeting with K.C.Pant of Rasta ([www.rasta.org.in](http://www.rasta.org.in)) turned out quite positive. Mieke had been busy months before to reach an agreement via email. In the beginning we were slightly annoyed as they had asked for 10% commission on all our financial transactions, but then we had no choice. While there K.C. took us to one of their projects, a girls' school with around 250 eager young girls in the slums of Delhi. We were very impressed and a little reconciled with the 10% as it was clear the money would be well spent.

I had the idea of buying an Indian Sim card but this turned out quite impossible. We spent a whole afternoon with paperwork, making passport photos, talking to different people in offices, but to no avail. The Indian government wants to keep track of all numbers and who owns them, due to fear of terrorism. Keeps people at work.

## SHA

At Bagdogra Airport we were met by G.S., our principal and Samjyor, a student of Dr. Graham's who had just done his class 12 exams. In the meantime he had his results and passed with 72.5, a little below what he was used to. He wants to study sociology at Delhi University and according to his class teacher he will probably be accepted, even with his results. He also won two prizes at Dr. Grahams, as best all-rounder and the progress prize.



Samjyor now teaches at SHA, as do all the older children when they have holidays or, like now, have to wait for their results. NimPhuti and RhaTshering are teaching too, and love it. On the way we hear all that's new. Sushila left school as being ill too often and suffering from home sickness. Diki Ongmu went to DPCA, the school where we all started and Phurkit is preparing for class 12 and her exams next year. Phukit is very worried as there are no teachers for science. A delegation from the village went to see some officials in Gangtok, to complain about this. Rinchen did his class 12 exams and wants to go to college in Gangtok to study commerce. He will surely pass as he was the best of his class during the last years. Next year Samten will join the army – he was a little too young this time. If he succeeds his entry exam, he will continue his studies and at the same time earn some money, to support his extremely poor family.

As always our first meeting with the children is heart-warming!

## STATISTICS

We now have 72 children at the school, in 7 classes from nursery onwards. There are 55 Boarders of whom 10 attend the government school. Then 9 children go to Dr. Grahams Homes in Kalimpong, 7 to the Tribal School in Gyangyap (Eklavya Model Residential School) and 2 to the new girls' school. Then, up north there is the Mayel Lyang Academy in Passingdang, Dzongu, where 21 children are sponsored. Together with Sangdup and Enjay who finish their studies this year (MA's in horticulture and Commerce) and Samjyor and Rinchen who start college, the total is 125.



Apart from K.C.Pant and his Rasta we also came into contact with James Ambat of Building Blocks India ([www.buildingblocksindia.org](http://www.buildingblocksindia.org)), an NGO in the south of India and whom we asked for help with the money, in the same way as Rasta. Our experience of the last years incited this doubling as in the past we lost a lot of time by trusting one party and coming out with nothing in the end. James runs 7 schools in Bangalore and Goa for nursery, LKG and UKG. He sounds very interested in our project and even ventures to pass by. This is a trip comparable in time to ours from Amsterdam. Upon arriving he immediately is very enthusiastic and even thinks of 'adopting' our school, as number 8.



Not only can he solve our financial problems through his FCRA but he also wants to put in place some managerial work. Mieke and I are overwhelmed and think: too good to be true. In the meantime we are a few weeks later and James has been to Buriakop a second time. He has talked extensively with G.S., made plans for the future of which contracting a matron and a manager form part. Also through Building Blocks we might be able to have volunteers again. James is prepared to send invitation letters necessary to get a volunteer a business visa. Also the first amount of money has been transferred from our account to that of James and from there to G.S. It reads as if it was quite easy but it was a hell of a job!

During his first stay at SHA, James shot some photos and moving images and this has resulted in a short impression/film: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWe61WdntDw>

We agreed with James not to be too open about our collaboration in view of the curiosity of the local authorities. First see how it works this coming year. That is the reason you won't find this on our websites.

The difficult part of our trip- as mentioned briefly in the beginning consisted of some harassment by the Intelligence Bureau. They checked on every move we made and also phoned G.S. about us nearly daily. Even the principal of the Tribal school was surprised by a visit of two officers inquiring why he had received us and whether he knew we were travelling on a tourist visa. He was threatened to be sent to jail if he did such a thing again. He did let us know by email that he was very upset, and furious. Later in Gangtok we heard that it was better to leave Sikkim directly and not pass by the school; which we did, in order not to endanger G.S. and SHA; but, of course, it was very sad that we could not say goodbye to the children.



After our return home we sent an email to our nice K.C.Pant, thanking him for all he did together with 350 euros for his girls in the slums.

## DZONGU

From Gangtok I leave with Loden to Dzongu, packed with clothes for the children. By now it's a tradition that I bring them new clothes. In Mangan I have to get an extra permit for Dzongu and discover I have Mieke's passport instead of mine. Fortunately Loden has fantastic connections and we don't have to go back, 3 hours drive. Mieke has stayed behind in Gangtok. Loden tells me about his problem in finding good teachers and is considering asking the help of a priest. In former days of course all good schools were run by the church and talks with some of the parents convinced him that it was a good idea, as long as they did not try to convert the children. In the evening I meet Sangdup who is studying in Mumbai and is finishing a paper for his MA. In spite of torrential rains the school has prepared a cultural event, singing and dancing are always endearing.



## DR.GRAHAM'S HOMES

Samjyor accompanies us to his school in Kalimpong. We have an appointment with the principal, Mrs. Peacock, to talk about 'our' children and particularly Samjyor who is leaving the school and needs a good college. Rha Tshering, Lemit, NimPhuti and Pemkit did their class 10 exams and we know now they all passed. Mrs. Peacock stresses that they too have to pass by to discuss their future with her. We will tell them but know also that they are a little scared of her.

## INNER WHEEL

In Gangtok we meet the ladies of the Inner Wheel, a service club related to the Rotary. Thanks to Mieke's mother and also because we think women more practical when it concerns support. It proved right. They were active, well educated and quite willing to help. For example they will look out for a suitable matron and a qualified teacher. Also they intend to visit the school.

## THE TRIBAL SCHOOL

We had not realized how big the event they were planning was and when we arrived we were met by a big round of applause from 250 students who had been waiting for us for 1 ½ hours. We feel very guilty and ashamed but fortunately after us arrives a very high ranking official. (Maybe she has been waiting around the corner not to embarrass us.) It's great to see Kursongkit who was 1 of the first students here after 6 years at SHA. She is one of the speakers and surprises us with her impeccable English. We had heard about her worries to study- next year she will do her class 12 exams and already now has to choose which subjects. When asked what she wants she hesitates - teacher. But what do you really want? - Doctor. But no question her father can afford that. Her marks for bio science were 92.4. We promise to pay for her studies.



As a present we brought a box with all the Harry Potter books. By just showing the outside of the box to the audience, a deafening cheering follows. So far there were only 3 books in the Library and they are overused. Mr Yonzone, the principal, promises to keep us informed about our children.



Jannie Langbroek, May 2013

Website [www.sikkim.nl](http://www.sikkim.nl) [www.sikkim-himalayan-academy.co.uk](http://www.sikkim-himalayan-academy.co.uk)