

Hands of Hope

by Liesel Briggs

She's only a girl, so school wasn't an option – until ten months ago. It is at least an hour walk for her little short legs to the closest school. The walk is possible, but the two hours plus time away from the farm, from helping is not. Then a small school opened in the midst of farmland in an unused community building. And the world opened. The principal saw the village, the farms, the children and remembered how it was for him. So, he decided to give back. He found some young people, mostly untrained but eager to teach. They all believe that literacy is important. It gives people choices. It gives people opportunities. So, the principal volunteers his work. Food, clothing and shelter is provided for him an hour away. The teachers are paid. The beginning wage was our equivalent of \$30 a month. That is subsistence, even there amongst the rice fields and cattle. But these teachers and the principal had and have a vision: to help educate the children.

With a notebook, a pencil, and shared tattered texts, the school started. One blackboard has been serving all 200 students from grade one to four. Teachers and principal come by bicycle or on foot along trails between fields. Children walk. Some children ford a river. Everyone is joyful and excited.

And the little girl – and her friends. Well, they are so

pleased. Enrolment, meant a uniform and a uniform is status. They now belong. They go to school!

Villagers were skeptical, initially. Will the girls study? Should our daughters go to school. When they are 13, they must get married. Now – at age five is time for learning to care for babies, and for the house.

A school committee was formed. Parents came to the meetings and asked questions. The school committee – mostly illiterate – saw the value of educating both boys and girls. Their chair – a leader in the community, and a man of importance as he can read and write, talked to them about the value of knowledge. He said it was time for mothers to learn about learning. As we all chant in the west parents are a child's first teacher. Well, the chairman wanted this to be so.

Parents are excited. They now support education. They come to see how their children are doing. Last year, after Hands of Hope assisted them financially to set up a small library – thanks to funds donated by Yukoners – the teachers asked if a work shop, some type of teacher in service would be possible. So one afternoon, after school, my time was dedicated to teaching reading and writing skills. Don't forget – you may have read a book to your child. But – if there are no libraries, and no books - except for the



Kids Helping Kids at J V Clark school has helped supply kids in Nepal with items for school.

text book - how can you introduce a child to this magical world? When would you have read to your little boy or girl? The workshop was a huge success. Everyone came. It was a community event for teachers, school committee, some of the students, some parents and a few itinerant goats that wandered by.

Rosemarie is now en route to India and Nepal. In the past year we set up five new libraries – three in India and two in Nepal. As well as providing support to those five schools and two prior to 2009, we will continue to establish libraries and help with the basics to support children. This year one Yukon teacher, on sabbatical, will help us by providing some teacher in services. However, she is traveling independently – with her own money, as we do. All our donated funds go to the project. We pay our own expenses, including plane fares.

Our present goals are to obtain more money to:

- ☐ Build two new libraries
- ☐ Provide furniture for one school
- ☐ Continue to support



Rosemarie (left) and Liesel Briggs visited J V Clark school in September and spoke to students and staff about their work in India and Nepal helping children and schools. Kids Helping Kids from J V Clark school has supported Liesel's work for the last three years at the Linh Son Orphanage in Lumbini, Nepal.

normal. This has been an extraordinary season of heat, then monsoon rain. Building projects have been delayed, washed away and put on hold. Fields, roads, earthen floor homes or classrooms and classes under trees and tarps have been soggy. A school in the mountains of northern India that is under construction, and for which we have been fund raising, is at least one month behind schedule due to the unduly long monsoon this year. Another school that is mainly out of doors had to send children home during the heat, because with the heat came a dry, strong wind making it very difficult to study.

Children were already

arriving at class between 6 and 6:30 a.m. Now comes the season of relatively good weather, not too cold and not too hot. It is a time for study and work.

Here is how you can make a difference. Support us in two ways:-

1) Financially by sending a cheque to Hands of Hope – Box 10278, Whitehorse, Yukon. Y1A 7A1. We will send a receipt to you.

2) Buy Hands of Hope Coffee – a specially brewed brand from Midnight Sun Coffee Roasters and available at their Whitehorse store. You can order online, too.

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present libraries

- Continue to support children's basic needs.
- For annual sponsorship for orphans' post secondary education (this is new as the orphans are reaching age 18 and it's either on the street or find a sponsor or sponsors) We will need three to four sponsors within six months)

As well we will:

- Continue teacher in-services

Since 2007 we have done the following:

- Provided thousands of library books
- Bought metal book shelving
- Purchased paint, win-

dows, flooring, furniture for libraries

- Established small text-book libraries for poor students
- Located teacher resources and resource books
- Bought learning games, videos, tapes, CDs, VCDs
- Given a one year teacher salary boost for under-paid rural teachers
- Set up teacher in-services
- Provided money for food, clothing, and blankets for 22 orphans
- Hired a carpenter to put windows in the orphanage bedrooms

At present life in the villages in northern India and southern Nepal is trying to return to