



Mayo Kids Help Nepal Kids

by Liesel Briggs

Many is the time when one questions what one's doing. When I sat in the Delhi railway station with my three bags, plus day back, and my porter had disappeared, I thought. Hmmm, this could be interesting. Two fifty pound bags and a lighter one, me and my little day pack against a solid mass of people. Those doing general boarding, in other words just getting onto the train wherever possible in third class were lined up the length of about two blocks. Behind them, on benches, bags, the concrete, standing, sitting, lying down or just hovering were the rest of us. The Vaisali Express - my train - was due to be in the station within moments. Excitement mounted.

Of course, there was speculation about this western woman with all this baggage sitting on a bench snapping photos and chatting. One fellow said "where your porter?" I shrugged. Then he shrugged and we chuckled as if to say, "What to do?"

However a few seconds later a lanky, thin grizzled man with his brown shawl wrapped into a ring came along, scooped up my stuff and beckoned me to follow,

quickly of course. So I followed. We lined up just behind the almost indecipherable line, and waited for the A2 car to slide to a stop. It did!! He knew his business and hustled

my stuff inside and stored it so well for me under my seat. Then I was enroute. Of course, my travelling companions were male, as was most of the car. They took great



This is my porter in Gorakhpur. He is walking with one of the people I shared the cab with to the Nepali border. The bags he is carrying on his head contain the gifts from Mayo students.

care of me and made sure I was safe. They were coming home for two months after three years away from their families. They were very, very happy to be on the train to Gorakhpur. Incidentally, I did meet a couple from Kathmandu and we organized to rent a car together and drive to Sanauli - the India-Nepal border - after our 12 hour train trip. Which we did. The train trip was fine. I slept, ate, drank chai, chatted a bit. Then off with only a stop for samosas and more chai. Both the Indian and Nepali border guards were pleased to see me and quickly processed my exit and entry. Then, after a rickshaw ride and then a rickety bus packed to double capacity where the conductor remembered me, I was at Lumbini.

Now, I didn't simply go to the school and drop off the many items and say surprise. I wanted to, but felt that I had to do a little more. What this meant was meetings with the headmaster, teachers and principal. Plus what we'd call a school -- a two storey brick and concrete school with steel sticking up in the air -- is run-down. The second floor is unfinished. There are many needs from good fencing to clean up. The classrooms are noisy. There is no acoustical material in the concrete and brick construction. Teachers are needed. Classrooms are, in some cases, severely cramped. (The nursery class has 64 students). Lighting is poor, too. Blackboards, even though recently painted are certainly not up to Canadian standards, but there's a board! More than 280 students attend this school from Nursery to fifth level. They are all from the surrounding area - the Tarai (plains). The children are mostly from farming families and



There were a lot of gasps and thank you "grandma" and "thank you to the children of Mayo" when I opened my big black bag of clothing and gifts. The children were really overwhelmed. Dolls and stuffed toys for kids who'd never had one each. Toy trucks, pins and sweat pants. The flashlights and calculators are a hit and so is everything from balls to hand cream and hair pins and little change purses! It was an exciting afternoon with them. They are all eager to write letters to their Mayo friends and we'll be doing this shortly. I will bring the letters home with me in March.

are dismally poor. The orphans, in particular, are also from this area. They are a result of the Maoist conflicts in the Tarai.

Not to belabour politics, but to touch on it briefly. Was it not for the headmaster this school would have been shut down for the past few months due to conflicts that even entered the school. One of the teachers was / is a Maoist and he said he wanted higher wages. For a number of reasons his wages were lower. He came to the Headmaster in the night and said he wanted more and if it didn't happen then he would talk to the local leader of his group. This has been sorted out as well as possible. He is still teaching. He has a small raise, but also he has had some

rules laid down. No bringing of politics into the school and inciting disturbances. So far, so good. But, you know, in this area you hear the megaphones and look. Is it someone advertising an India tractor - Mahindra, or is it the Maoists, or what? Posters go up and posters come down.

The orphan children of Linh Son school asked me to thank you for everything. I bought them blankets and also sweat pants, shirts and undershirts and gave those along with some fleece vests and jackets, socks, the ball and pump, flashlights, calculators, hand cream, trucks and many other things,

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including the stuffed toys. I had added some girls hair things and some other items for boys. Additionally, the City of Whitehorse and Government of Yukon gave me some pins which they are now wearing, too.

To talk about the blankets, briefly. I bought 24 fleece blankets. Each of the children, plus the two house mothers now have an additional blanket. The children had mentioned they were cold and I took a look. Yes, they needed blankets. What was / is really bad is the windows. They have only metal covering, like a grate to keep animals from climbing in, but there is no glass. So in monsoon, rain comes in and in the winter it's cold. In two days, window glass will be put into the children's rooms. That is one of the other expenditures I am making with the money you donated.

As you may or may not know,

the Yukon Department of Education donated a number of books. Terry Markley was very generous. I added to those books as well. So, as you may have guessed we are

setting up a library. It will be for the entire school. However, as there was no room for this, we are making a divider in one larger room, adding some benches, some metal shelving for the books and voila a library. Well, it sounds easy, but I have been to building supplies, welding shops, the local sawmill for dimensional lumber, the paint store and electrical store too. I did have help and that is the only way it all got done yesterday. We filled up one truck and took everything back to the school. The truck rental was about \$10 for hauling everything from the various shops to the school, a mere two hours by vehicle. It's not a flat open road, don't forget. It's a road where you come bumper to bumper with bullocks hauling sugar cane, then you slide around that to meet a transport truck who is weaving his way through, too. Of course there are the inevitable bicycle rickshaws and bicycles, busses and foot traf-



Let's play Ball! This ball is jealously guarded by the children and they won't allow the rest of the school kids to use it. It's the first piece of gym equipment at Linh Son! A rope strung between two buildings is a net and the soccer ball becomes a volleyball!



The children help to unload building material for the library building project.

fic. Did I mention goats? So, the ride is anything but boring. Now I have contracted a carpenter and work starts in two days and since I'm holding the purse strings and have said I'm leaving soon. If it's not done, there's no money. Every one seems pretty eager to do the job. Tomorrow, I'll be contract manager and will also start stamping each book with the Linh Son school stamp and entering them in a ledger.

This library will be a vast improvement for the school. The teachers are excited. I have some Oxford picture dictionaries I purchased for them and also an inflatable globe. It's out of date, but considering there's none in the school, it's a start.



Outside front view of the school.

The orphan children and I will be doing some crafts and also letter writing this week. They are anxious to thank you personally for all your donations. Everything you sent was a huge success.

Considering the amount of the donation from Mayo school students and community for which I thank you again, Thank you, too, to Nancy Fowles of Victoria and Margaret Mundell from Whitehorse

for their donations. Yes, the focus is on the orphans - 22 boys and girls, but what they receive can in some way affect the school population and any school upgrade will also affect the orphans. My best wishes to you,



Lumbini, Nepal -- located at the 7 near the middle of the country -- is the birthplace of Buddha and home to the orphan children and school whom the Mayo students are helping and exchanging letters.