

Ghar Sita Mutu House With A Heart

A home for abandoned children and a training program for destitute women in Kathmandu, Nepal

AUGUST 2007

HELLO FRIENDS,

I'm sitting in my sweltering antique shop in the East Village of New York City remembering how cold it was when I arrived in Nepal early in February 2007. Winter is not kind in Kathmandu, and with no heat in our concrete house, it makes it almost unbearable to us spoiled Westerners. I was sleeping in all my clothes with a wooly hat, overcoat and hot water bottle, putting off for as long as possible taking a cold shower. Luckily,

Letter from Beverly continues on page 3



Women in the process of making felt in a new program funded by a generous grant from the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation.

SHELLEY & DONALD RUBIN FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANT

In April we were thrilled to receive our first grant, a generous \$5,000 award from the **Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation** to develop and implement a felt-making program for impoverished women. The program has been an exciting new venture for Ghar Sita Mutu. A felt-making workshop has been set up, and in just two months six women have been trained, providing them with new employment opportunities. The felt is being used to create a number of crafts including wall hangings, which is a new item for the organization that

grew out of this felt-making project. It provides an exciting way for the women to exercise their creativity, as well as learn new skills to make money to support their families.

We have found that women and children suffering from malnutrition are often slow to learn, so we make allowances for the women to stay as long as necessary to learn the process.

SEPTIC PROBLEMS AND THE ROAD WE COVET

One thing happened this year that I didn't expect. We had plans to join in on a septic system being installed near our back gate. Unfortunately, the land was sold and the plan canceled. Our current septic tank is supposed to be good for six years, but I fear the risks of leakage and health problems.

To address this issue I have put a deposit on a small piece of land on the other side of our compound and have until September to pay the full amount. A new road through the fields has already been developed over there, and pipes for the septic system have been installed. If we can connect our property to this land, we can run pipes from our tank to the road. When I return in September I hope to be able to install a new septic system. Unfortunately, land is very expensive because our area is now being developed. This small piece, adjacent to our library wall, was the only one available and will cost \$15,000. We have already collected \$5,000. **If anyone is able to make a donation to help us with this, it would be most appreciated.** (See page 4 to make a donation.)



The land inside the wall belongs to Ghar Sita Mutu. We'd like to purchase a small, narrow plot just on the other side of the wall for access to the sewer. Can you help?

WOMEN'S SEWING PROGRAM

This year we were hoping to expand both our women's training program and the community children's program, and I am happy to report we were able to do both. **Sylvia Montes**, a volunteer artist/designer came to Nepal on a three-month working visit from Brazil. She was a tremendous help with our sewing program, designing items and making patterns. These items included t-shirts (hand-painted by our children and sewn by the ladies), colourful felt wall hangings, and a



variety of puppets and sari bags. These items are selling quite well in my small antique shop (A Repeat Performance in NYC).

Rajina Banepali, our dance teacher/caregiver at Ghar Sita Mutu, has taken on an additional role with us. She is now running the felt-making program and also teaching puppet making. **Nabina Rana**, has joined Rajina in the afternoons teaching advanced hand sewing to our felt-makers. The women making the handicrafts are being paid by us to train, and will also receive payment for their future work with us.

One of the women in our felt-making and sewing program is **Tara**, an impoverished woman struggling to raise two children on her own. She suffers from the effects of childhood malnutrition and epilepsy, and her two children were both unhealthy when they first came to us. Nabina has taken them under her wing, and we sent the whole family to the doctor for check-ups (thanks to **Cassandra Okoye** who set up an emergency medical fund in memory of her mother **Evelyn Buckendah Dirksen**). We have also enrolled



the children in a local school. Our hope is that if the mother becomes too ill to care for the children, the school would provide a safety net for them.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAM

We hired a teacher to start our tutoring program for children who can't afford to go to school. Thank you to **Karen Zusman**, another long time friend and supporter for making this possible. We were lucky to find **Nabina Rana**, a Nepali college student majoring in social work and dance. Nabina is also in charge of the Saturday **library/art sessions** to make them more effective for our younger students. Up to one hundred children from the local community come on Saturdays for art, dance and library – most of them have never even seen a picture book. We purchased some benches, books, notebooks, pencils, and other supplies. These improvements were appreciated by our adult literacy students as well.



LETTER FROM BEVERLY (continued from page 1)

this extreme cold only lasted for the first two and a half weeks of my stay, and the children and I welcomed spring and the Holi Festival with a vengeance. Holi is the festival of colour – and is celebrated by everyone throwing balloons filled with coloured water at family, friends and total strangers.

The children finished the first year at their new school and all passed their exams, although two of them are just squeaking by. All are in good health and spirits. During the month-long holiday (followed by a two week strike!), the children enjoyed playing basketball on our new court with the basketball net kindly donated by **Fred Ripley**, from Nashville, Tennessee. Fred, a long-time supporter of Ghar Sita Mutu, had come to Nepal to “see for himself” and was kind enough whilst there to give a teacher training seminar at our centre for local schoolteachers. It was enjoyed by participants from seven different schools, and we hope to welcome Fred back in the future. Many thanks, Fred.



The Ghar Sita Mutu boys enjoy “fishing” in a large puddle near our house.

We stayed close to home during the holiday because the political situation is still quite volatile. Nepal is not yet at peace. Journalists are often intimidated, and there has been a wave of abductions of businessmen in the capital, and political violence is on the increase in the southern Terai region. The spring of 2007 was marked with strikes and food and gas shortages. Prices for our supplies have gone up significantly.

Despite this, the Ghar Sita Mutu family had fun together, working in the garden, playing on the swings, taking walks to the forest, and, as a special treat, swimming at a tourist hotel twice. The children also enjoyed painting for the first time – both on fabric and on paper, taught by **Sylvia Montes**, our volunteer from Brazil. The children painted pictures that were later sewn on to t-shirts, which we are selling to raise money for our programs.



The Ghar Sita Mutu girls celebrated their birthdays in April. This is the second year that we’ve had this birthday party for them. We don’t know the actual birthdays of most of our children, but it’s great fun to have one big party!

A highlight for me was being able to give each child their own bamboo bookshelf (\$1.50 each) to put next to their beds. I watched with delight their pleasure as they arranged and constantly re-arranged their few possessions, books, and photographs. Along with the gift came the lecture on privacy – how no one should peek under pillows or touch others’ shelves without permission. It’s a lesson that’s hard for these children to grasp. Sometimes I forget the hardships and traumas they have suffered.

A special mention here and a huge thank you to **Bidur Gurung**, our manager and Baba (father) to the children, who takes care of everything in my absence. I am still only allowed a visa for five months a year, despite my Mummy title. Bidur’s job of keeping the peace with children, staff, women trainees, and city officials, as well as keeping track of the finances for both the home and the training program is not easy, but is *greatly appreciated*. When I’m not in Nepal, Bidur and I e-mail daily and often wish we had a child psychologist to advise us in certain situations. If anyone is interested in helping us in this way, please let us know.

Now that we are living in this wonderful roomy house, it is easy to forget our humble beginnings in a small rented house. Throughout our development the role of our donors has been absolutely vital to our success and growth. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank you all for being such a key part of our ever-evolving family and community.

*With love and thanks,
Beverly and all the children at Ghar Sita Mutu*

GRADUATE

We said goodbye to 20-year-old **Santosh** in April who felt ready to live on his own and attend college. We wish him all the success and happiness in the future. Santosh was 12 when he joined our family. He was desperate to go to school and his parents could no longer afford to send him. They wanted him to return to their home in the Terai, where he would not be able to attend school, so he was happy to stay with us. Santosh worked hard organizing and running our library program and also helped with the younger children. We thank Santosh for all of his hard work; he will be missed.

SAVE THE DATE

Hope to see you at our next fundraiser
Food, music & fun!

Tentative date: **Monday, December 3**
Performance Space 122
150 First Avenue
NY, NY

GOATS

Alexa Doering has been helping me in many ways this past year, and she had the opportunity to go to Nepal two weeks after I left there. She was eager to help distribute goats to waiting families in the Terai, and accompanied **Birendra Singh**, one of our board members, on the long, grueling bus ride to Raj Biraj. Alexa had many adventures getting the goats to the families in the remote village, and the families were thrilled to receive them. We plan to expand the program by passing on the first-born female from each family. Great work, Alexa...and well done for braving all the elements on your first trip!



Goats were distributed to 18 families in a remote village of the Terai region in southern Nepal.



Arun, a talented 17-year-old artist and a neighbor of ours, teaches the children drawing in our Saturday program. Here he puts the finishing touches on one of the murals he painted on the inside of our garden wall.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

My name is Beverly Bronson. I own a small antique shop, A Repeat Performance, in New York City. Eight years ago while working as a volunteer in Nepal, I found two abandoned children, Krishna and Babu, ages two and five. After searching for a loving home for them, I had no choice but to put them in boarding school. Safe but bleak. The school appointed me as guardian and I went back to New York with plans to raise money to establish a centre to house abandoned children and help destitute women.

With the help and generous support of Noel Faulkner and Dr. Mark Rodgers, who both made a long term commitment to help me raise the children and build a centre, I returned to Nepal with enough funds to rent a house. We opened Ghar Sita Mutu - House with a Heart in 2001, and have been expanding our reach into the community every year. I split my time between New York and Nepal.

Here is how you can help

Ghar Sita Mutu relies on the generosity of friends like you. All donations are tax deductible and go directly toward expanding our programs. You can make a real difference in our work.

*Please make all checks payable to our fiscal sponsor:
The Candy Jernigan Foundation for the Arts
and note "Ghar Sita Mutu" on your check.*

*Mail checks to:
Ghar Sita Mutu
P.O. Box 152
New York, NY 10011*

Thank you!

For more information, call Beverly at 212-529-0832.