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Peace Corps Nepal Update

COVID-19 continues to affect people all over Nepal. The Peace Corps office remains open, but there is yet no timeline for Volunteers to return. Country Director Sherry Russell sends this message from the office in Kathmandu, “We continue to work towards and look forward to the day when Volunteers return to Nepal. In March, during the evacuation, I think we all thought that the Volunteers would be back soon. None of us could have predicted that the pandemic would play out the way it has, nor that it would have gone on this long. We stay in touch with our evacuated RPCVs and feel glad to know that many of them have found meaningful work and/or engagement with graduate studies in the months since they left. Some still express an interest in returning to service once that becomes possible. Now we are just waiting for incidence rates to decline, as is the rest of the world. We have no doubt, however, that one day the Volunteers will be back and what a celebration we will have once that day arrives.”

Looma – An Innovative Approach to Education in Nepal

BY DUANE KARLEN

Imagine a typical classroom in rural Nepal. There may be a blackboard, and hopefully chalk, but there likely isn't much in the way of teaching aids or educational equipment. Students may have textbooks, but there probably aren't reference materials. Teachers may be familiar with the national

curriculum, but the quality of teaching to it will vary a lot. Opportunities to access educational content outside of textbooks are limited. Students will have heard of computers and the internet, but few have direct experience with them. Most likely, WIFI is not available. Electricity may or may not be present on a reliable schedule. Teaching, and learning, in such a school is a challenge!

David Sowerwine and Skip Stritter looked closely at this challenge and decided to meet it head on. With their ingenuity and technical savvy, a few years ago they created a box to bring into such a classroom. It's about a foot square, with plywood top and sides, and they called it

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Looma in use, Shree Janata Basic Level School, Guheri, Nawalparasi

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a “Looma.” Powered with rechargeable solar batteries, it contains a computer and LED audio-visual projector. It comes preloaded with Ministry of Education textbooks and 15,000 open-source media files, including Khan Academy courses, TED Talks, Wiki for Kids pages, history time lines, maps, educational games and videos covering all school subjects in Nepali and English for grades 1 through 10.

Everything loaded on the Looma can be projected on a classroom wall or piece of hanging fabric. The box has speakers which can be heard throughout the classroom. The teacher, using a remote wand, can display content, while students see and hear in both Nepali and English.

Looma Education, as David and Skip call their organization, rolled out Looma in 12 schools in the Kathmandu Valley and Nawalparasi District during 2019-20, after a week-long program of training teachers to use it. The plan was to expand this to a hundred schools during the current school year, extending the range to include other parts of Nepal.

Then COVID-19 struck. Schools closed and travel became difficult. It appeared that the Looma project had come to a standstill. But, as Skip relates, the virus actually precipitated a new opportunity that took the project in a whole new direction. To complement the box, they decided to also put the Looma educational content online and introduce it in this format to the next set of schools that had been chosen to receive Looma.

At the same time, drawn by public eagerness to use this online resource, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Nepal designated the Looma project as the online platform for school learning in Nepal. MOE is now working with Looma Education through an education NGO, Education Resource and Development Center Nepal (ERDCN), to eventually bring learning, through either physical Loomas or Looma Online, to every one of the

“It is more like Aladdin’s lamp. It has everything, within the box, you need to run a successful class.”
Prathana, teacher in Nepal.

more than 30,000 schools in Nepal.

The initial steps in this process are already underway. Teacher training is being conducted online for 35 schools in Chitwan, Gorkha and Lamjung Districts. Since using Looma Online requires computers and electricity, many challenges remain, but Looma Education has applied for grant money to bring the project to many more schools.

Looma Education began in 1996 as EcoSystems Nepal with the mission of providing safe, efficient and inexpensive transport and energy systems for people in rural Nepal.



Looma in the classroom (Photo courtesy Looma Education)



Looma in the classroom (Photo courtesy Looma Education)

The organization was founded by David and Haydi Sowerwine, who arrived in Nepal

Tech Specs

Looking at technical details, the Looma box is truly impressive. It consists of a powerful Linux computer with massive 128 GB storage, a bright 700-lumen projector that creates a 3’ x 6’ image on a white wall or hanging fabric, speakers that deliver ample sound for the whole classroom, and a webcam to record teacher and student presentations. It uses only 55W from deep-cycle 12-volt batteries that are charged with solar power, and it has connectivity by mobile phone, Ethernet, USB, and WiFi when available. The box is fully interactive, controlled by an aerial mouse (a wand) from anywhere in the room. In addition to the content mentioned in the accompanying article, its open-source software features include built-in dictionary, English text-to-speech (which can “read” the text to students), lesson plans, white board and other applications. In short, it can provide an interactive window to educational content for any school, even without an Internet connection.

in 1991 and continued to live there for many years. With their engineering background, they realized that simple technology solutions could be applied to solve daily challenges faced by rural communities. This thought inspired the creation of the “Wire-Bridge” – a human-powered river-crossing system which has facilitated over 3 million trips across deep river gorges in Nepal.

The organization was renamed VillageTech Solutions (VTS) in 2008, when Skip Stritter joined them. VTS became a global umbrella organization. Then in 2019, VTS was renamed Looma Education (LE) to emphasize a focus on education. Since its inception, EcoSystems/VTS/LE has spear-

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Note From The Editor

Namaste All!

Nothing has impacted our world and our way of life more in 2020 than COVID-19. In every country on earth, people are trying to manage the changes and repercussions that the spreading virus is having on their lives. This is precipitating difficulty and frustration, even anger and blame. And, although everyone faces health risk, the burden of suffering falls heaviest, as usual, on those who are poor, unemployed, displaced or marginalized.

The current situation can, with good reason, lead us to feel isolated or worry about our future. It may be difficult to travel, get together with family and friends, and pursue plans and dreams that we hold for our future. But, as in any situation of great change and challenge, there are also opportunities. We can decide to look inside and see what is really important to us and those we care about. We can reach out, either to offer a hand or to ask for help. We can connect by electronic means. We can look for ways to volunteer our time and talents, and share the resources we have. We didn't ask for the difficulties of the present time, but we can make the choice to face and accept them. Let's hope the new year brings a new dawn of hope and success in dealing with the virus. In the meantime,

let's look for opportunities and see what we can do for ourselves, for others and for the world we live in.

This issue of the newsletter focuses on a couple of exciting projects that are underway in relation to Nepal. Looma Education has the potential to change public education in every school in Nepal with their new MOE initiative...and they are looking for help from people like you! Plus Mac Odell talks about the Great Himalayan Trail as a way to build a cross-Nepal trekking route in a manner that exemplifies grassroots development and empowers local people.

Of great importance, this is the time of the year when FoN asks for donations through its Annual Appeal in order to fund projects in the coming year. Given the impact that COVID is having in Nepal, the grants we fund in 2021 will be particularly important, and we ask for your generosity. Details are on the Annual Appeal Announcement page. Speaking of grants, FoN regretfully bids farewell to Val Stori, who has been the chair of FoN's Projects Committee for the past 13 years, as well as a member of the Board. Thank you, Val, for your years of valuable assistance.

Further related to the Projects Committee, King Beach provides a final report on one of the projects completed last year in the

"Your Donations at Work" section. Also in this issue, we have a personal reflection by Keith Cunningham, N-17, on how being a Nepal PCV has impacted his life, an interview with the creator of the classic Himalayan Gourmet Cookbook, and some other items of interest.

Please note that the newsletter accepts advertising for services, products, etc. whether they relate to Nepal or not, so think about how you might promote what you do to our readership. FoN members get a discount on the fee. Contact newsletter@friendsofnepal.com to discuss details.

As usual, the newsletter welcomes your comments, ideas, photos and story ideas. In particular we could use recent photos to add visual interest to our pages. Please contact me if you have some to offer.

Friends of Nepal wishes each of you happy holidays and a New Year filled with health, peace and well-being. And may Peace Corps be able to resume Volunteer activities in Nepal soon!

Duane Karlen
Editor

newsletter@friendsofnepal.com

FoN is looking for help!

FoN needs help in two important areas. Suzie Schneider, who has been FoN's Treasurer for many years, would like to transition out of this role in a year, and she offers to mentor and work side-by-side (remotely!) with someone for a year to learn the books, manage FoN's fiscal dealings and communicate with members about fundraising. The work is definitely only part time, but it's critical to FoN's operations as a grant-funding and non-profit organization.

Our other big area of need involves our website, which needs some editing and updating. No programming skill is required since the site is hosted on NPCA's platform, and they manage all the technical stuff. As our web person, you would update content, figure out logical headings and tabs, and work with the NPCA web person to make it all look good. Again, it's only a very part time commitment.

Perks for both include good resume experience, a letter of recommendation, LinkedIn endorsements, plus working with some delightful people and greatly benefiting FoN.

Contact info@friendsofnepal.org to discuss either of these opportunities.

Thank you Val Stori!!

VAL IS STEPPING DOWN AS FON PROJECTS COMMITTEE CHAIR AND FON BOARD MEMBER

Val has been an invaluable member of the board since 2007. She first joined the Projects Committee in 2004 and then began serving as its chairperson in 2007. Through her leadership, the committee has funded several projects per year to organizations working in Nepal, focusing on education, healthcare, women's empowerment, children's welfare and other objectives. During this time, the committee has awarded many tens of thousands of dollars, contributed by the generosity of FoN members, to one successful project after another. She has been particularly dedicated to, as she puts it, "lifting women out of poverty, one grant at a time."

Though never a PCV, Val worked in Nepal for many years and was happy to discover FoN as a way to contribute to organizations improving the livelihoods of Nepalis. In 2001, she joined a program called Wildland Studies, teaching semester-long field biology classes for students from American Universities. Her groups would spend about seven weeks in the field, usually in eastern Nepal in either the Kanchenjunga or Makalu Barun regions. Between semesters, she often stayed in Kathmandu, working for the World Wildlife Fund (more field biology-related work.)

Val's interest in working with Nepalese women was sharpened during those early years in Kathmandu. She began making Saturday trips to the elderly people's ashram at Pashupatinah, where she hand-washed clothes and bed linen in the morning, then shared tea with the older, bedridden residents. Her Nepali teacher then introduced her to the Mata Tirtha Old Age Home, where, hearing the stories of the women, she in her words, "fully grasped the disturbing and devastating effects of the marginalization of women in Nepal," with few prospects for a decent education, a livelihood beyond menial labor or landownership.

When she found out about FoN in 2004, Val joined the Projects Committee and began helping those women and others like them through FoN's grant program. In more recent years, the focus has been on an initiative which FoN called Let Girls Learn, based on Michelle Obama's initiative to help adolescent girls reach their full potential through education initiatives. FoN's Let Girls Learn theme was expanded beyond girls education to include life skills and livelihood development for women. And,



before she left, Val was advocating for the 2021 grants to continue to help women, but with the important additional factor of coping with COVID-19.

Val, on behalf of the Friends of Nepal Board and all its membership, we are deeply grateful to you and we wish you success and happiness as you move on to work with the Hands in Outreach organization, continuing your dedication to helping the women and girls of Nepal.

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headed safe, clean and affordable technology solutions that have improved the lives of rural communities in Nepal and other developing countries. The current Looma project continues to carry out this mission by allowing teachers to provide a level of education never before achieved in Nepal, with the added feature that it can be configured to the curriculum for any other country as well.

While David and Skip have been the primary architects of this project, they have enlisted help from many others. In particular they have partnered with engineering schools at Dartmouth, Stanford, Santa Clara, UC San Diego and the Colorado School of Mines to get students involved

in the prototype design and development of hardware and software for Looma. This volunteer assistance has been critical to the success of the project, and it has also contributed to the education of those involved, especially in the area of applying basic technical creativity to the challenges of developing countries. They also work closely with Nepali educational and technical colleagues, and it is these people who are currently working in Nepal to expand the project, even in the face of COVID-19 difficulties.

The adoption of the Looma project by Nepal's MOE will require a great deal of additional work and offers important op-

portunities for Nepal RPCVs to contribute. David and Skip are asking for help...see page 8 for specifics.

(David Sowerwine, along with his wife Haidi, lived and worked in Nepal from 1991-2005 and have returned many times since. Skip Stritter first traveled to Nepal in 1982 to visit his PCV mom, who introduced him to the Sowerwines. Skip's mother was Preb Stritter, N-95, a math-science education Volunteer who taught in Gorkha District. Preb is well-known to the RPCV community and was one of the early pioneers of the FoN organization.)

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Friends of Nepal Annual Appeal – You Can Help!

Sabailai Namaskar and Seasons' Greetings!

Without a doubt, 2020 has been a challenging year for both our members and our Nepali friends. COVID has swept America and is having grim consequences for Nepal as well. The on-going growth in US positive cases is staggering, and we are all affected. In Nepal, national and local administrations across the country have enforced prohibitory orders and curfews. Many schools have been closed. Tourism and foreign remittances have dried up, and people are facing dire economic and health conditions.

It is in this difficult environment that FoN comes to you with our Annual Fundraising Appeal.

Over the past few years, our FoN grants have mostly focused on helping women and girls with education, life skills and family support, and we want to continue working in these sectors. However, our priority in the coming year will be different. Due to COVID-19, in 2021 we will modify our "Let Girls Learn" theme of the past four years and focus on grants that help women, girls and families cope and learn in a COVID environment. Using your donations, we will solicit proposals during the first half of 2021 and

make awards to the Nepal NGO's that look the most promising.

As you may know, we recently sponsored a special COVID relief campaign, and that effort has brought in some \$7,000. While this reflects much generosity on the part of donors, we want to set a total fundraising goal of \$20,000. Doing so will allow us to provide a greater number of grants to various organizations so that that we can serve more people and have a larger impact. Along these lines, if you know of an effective grassroots organization that you think should be considered for a FoN grant, please bring it to our attention by emailing info@friendsofnepal.com.

I am certain that your contributions to this year-end campaign, as in past years, will be generous, and for this the Board of Directors of Friends of Nepal and its committees express our sincere thanks.

Wishing you the best possible holidays with good health, and with much gratitude,

Dan

Dan Donaghue, N-47

President, Friends of Nepal

You may donate to this year's appeal in one of 3 ways:

1. Go to our website at www.friendsofnepal.com and click on the "Donate" button.
2. Complete the "Donations" form on the last page of this newsletter and submit it to the address provided.
3. Wait until you receive FoN's Annual Appeal Letter in the mail later this month and send in your donation using the envelope provided.

(FoN's Annual Appeal Letter is being sent out via snail mail in December. You will receive a copy if we have your current US mailing address on file. If you want to be sure we have your current correct address, send it in an email to info@friendsofnepal.com. Thank you again for your kindness and generosity.)



Photo by John Buscarino, N-204

Mac Odell and The Great Himalaya Trail

500 miles as the *kaag* flies, 1,000 miles on foot!

BY DUANE KARLEN

Wouldn't it be an exciting adventure to trek from Nepal's eastern border near Kanchenjunga all the way across the northern part of the country to the Darchula area on the western border. And do it by spending nights in communities along the way, with accommodations and meals provided by local residents, along with information about local sights and culture. This is what Mac Odell envisions when he talks about the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) and how it might come to be.

The idea of a trekking trail across Nepal is not new. It began to surface in the 1980's after Nepal opened up several areas along the northern border that had previously been restricted. A number of adventurers, hikers, runners and cultural anthropologists then traversed the country, and wrote about their experiences. There is even a book about it called *Nepal Trekking and the Great Himalaya Trail: A Route and Planning Guide* by Robin Boustead.

In fact, a couple of Himalayan traverses have been proposed, a high route ("extreme route") and a low route ("cultural route") – each winding about a thousand miles east to west. (Nepal is about 500 miles from the east to west, but trekking on up-and-down, zigzag paths doubles the distance for the foot traveler.) The high route would go through alpine mountain landscapes and passes, requiring special equipment and local mountain guides in certain places. The low route would cross the middle hills, walking through forests, pastures, green rice terraces and fertile agricultural land, where there are settlements of many different cultural groups.

The current problem with such a trail, whether "high" or "low," is that it doesn't allow a hiker to easily rely on local accommodations. In some popular areas, north of Pokhara and in the Everest area, it's easy



to join masses of tourists who do these treks every year and find an immense array of food, lodging and supplies along the way. But in most areas not currently frequented by tourists, especially in the west, there are long isolated stretches where trekking by the average visitor is very difficult.

That is, unless you want to join a guided group with a trekking company. In that case, you will sleep in a nice tent, have food cooked for you, all gear provided...and you need carry only a light day pack. A retinue of guides, cooks, porters and servers will accompany you. But you won't meet many local people. And it will cost you...a lot. World Expeditions will gladly reserve you a spot in one of their Great Himalaya Trail excursions, which takes 150 days from east to west, for around \$26,000!

But that's not the kind of experience Mac Odell is talking about. His Great Himalaya Trail trek would seamlessly take the traveler from one area to the next, with local communities taking responsibility for their part of the trail, looking after it, providing food and lodging, perhaps offering glimpses into local culture, wildlife, and points of interest. The communities themselves would be making decisions about how to maintain the local environment, encourage and support visitors, and keep money earned within their local community rather than have it go to an international tour company.

Some trail development has already happened, although in scattered fashion, especially in the Lukla-Namche-Everest area and the round-Annapurna circuit. But most of northern Nepal is poor and remote, and trekking tourism has neither been developed nor promoted. Mac hopes to change this by mobilizing marginalized



On the trail. (Photo by Jon Stewart, N-19)

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A Chat with Mac Odell

BY DUANE KARLEN

Malcolm Odell was a PCV in the first group to go to Nepal in 1962. In total he has spent 19 years abroad, 13 years in Nepal and nine in rural communities in Asia and Africa. He has worked with The World Bank, USAID, NORAD, IFAD, CARE, NIH, IRC, Pact, Japan International Cooperation Agency, The Heifer Project, Habitat for Humanity, Winrock International, The Salvation Army and other organizations. His endeavors have involved community mobilization, women's empowerment, strategic planning, monitoring/evaluation, conflict resolution, eco-tourism, climate change, skills training, and project management for poverty alleviation. He is particularly known globally for the creation of an innovative organizational development and mobilization strategy, "Appreciative Planning and Action" (APA), used successfully in peace-building efforts with almost 400,000 rural people in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Kenya, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone. He holds a BA from Princeton, and MS and PhD degrees in applied development sociology from Cornell University.

FoN: You were in N-1 from 1962-64. Where were you and what did you do as a Volunteer?

Mac: My first PCV tour was in Dhankuta, where I taught vocational training and conducted teacher training at Gokundeshwar High School. After this, I continued on into a second tour in Solukhumbu District, working in Phaplu and Namche Bazaar, teaching in one of Hillary's elementary schools and developing Sherpa-led eco-tourism. I ended my Volunteer service in 1967, then hitchhiked from Kathmandu to Paris with my Sherpa friend, Kaldhen.

FoN: How many times have you been back to Nepal since your PCV days?

Mac: From 1994-2002, I worked in a number of different capacities in Nepal. I was co-manager of the Makalu Barun Conservation Project, helping to start a new national park; community advisor for the Kali-Gandaki Hydro-Power Project; and Community Mobilization Advisor for Habitat for Humanity. Then in 2006, I returned to serve as co-orga-

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communities along the route to come up with ways of generating income through infrastructure development, conservation and eco-tourism. The model he is proposing is based on a successful prototype that he and his partner Brian Peniston, also a former Volunteer, implemented in the Makalu-Barun Conservation area in the 1990's. Using a participatory problem-solving and idea-generating process based on "Appreciative Inquiry," called Appreciate Planning and Action, or APA for short, (described in the adjoining interview,) he and his Nepali team worked with local communities in Nepal to help them make decisions about how to create successful and sustainable eco-tourism and micro-enterprise development projects across the Makalu Barun Park.

In order to expand these efforts to other areas, Mac and Brian are applying for a Rotary International grant for \$140,000 to fund economic and community development of eco-tourism along the GHT route. The Snow Leopard Conservancy, an international NGO that has been active across the Himalayan region, will serve as the project's umbrella organization. Specifically, the focus will be

on development of a grass-roots conservation-based ecotourism industry consisting of small business and savings groups - including tea shops, small restaurants and lodges, guide services and cultural programs - to dramatically increase local incomes.

The project would begin on a pilot basis in selected villages at the eastern end of the GHT. Training teams would organize and sequentially train local Nepalese in each of five village sections distributed across the thousand mile GHT. These section leaders would in turn work with the villages in their respective sections to engage key persons in dozens of communities, ultimately reaching 40-60,000 marginalized local villagers. The



(Photo from GHT Flyer)

entire process will promote and emphasize local decision making, action steps and continued sustainability. The proposed project is also intended to strengthen local village governments, so they can maintain control over their ecology and natural resources, especially when faced with outside pressures and inducements to do otherwise.

Key partners in the project would include the Nepal Rotary District, with its 72 clubs and 2,100 members, other grass-roots NGOs, the Government of Nepal, local and international travel and tour companies, other interested Nepal-based conservation and development organizations, and of pivotal importance, an in-place cadre of trained indigenous mentors. On the stateside front, the project team will develop a working relationship with an international tour company, already well established in Nepal, to expand eco-tourism offerings along the GHT and attract tourist dollars to underserved villages.

Mac and his colleagues expect grant approval for the pilot phase within the next few months, followed by full funding for Years 2-3 in 2021.

LOOMA: How Can You Get Involved?



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You can read much more about Looma on the website: <https://www.looma.education>

And you can see Looma Online in action at: <https://looma.website/Looma/looma-home.php>

Looma has been developed through the heart-felt contributions of hundreds of volunteers. We are looking for more volunteer help, particularly from lovers of Nepal, to continue improving Looma, especially as it undertakes its new Nepal-wide MOE initiative. If you would like to help or talk about possibilities, please contact us at david@looma.education and skip@looma.education.

Thank you,
David Sowerwine and Skip Stritter

Areas of need

Teachers: Looma's partially-retired teacher team is tackling the challenge of making good Active Learning lesson plans. With some 926 lesson plans to go, they welcome help from all RPCV teachers.

Translating: Looma aims to provide Nepali translations of all the presentation slides in all the lessons on Looma. If you are proficient in Nepali, you can help make these translations, using online Looma tools.

Teacher Training: We are starting to develop online teacher training videos for Looma teachers, in English and in Nepali. Experienced teacher trainers are needed to help launch this important extension of Looma's capabilities.

Media Gathering: Looma currently contains over 15,000 media files but needs more, especially media in Nepali language or relevant to Nepali life and culture. You can help us gather new Internet media files to be integrated into the Looma Library and to work with existing (I) NGOs to make short educational videos on their subjects.

Educational Activities: We need volunteer help to compose and support Looma-based challenges, competitions, educational events; support formation of student Looma clubs and learning pods; or organize a "Looma Teacher's Association" for training, motivation, support and sharing.

Social Media: Our teachers in Nepal are asking for a Facebook page where the Looma community can gather. Students could also benefit from a social media site(s).

Other Content: Compose and enhance learning apps and games, expand the Looma dictionary, create short videos about career paths, put English and/or Nepali subtitles into existing videos, etc.

Software and hardware development: Experienced engineers can apply to Looma Education to contribute to technical projects.

Fundraising: Money is needed to assist clusters of schools to get Looma Online.

Chat with Mac Continued

nizer of Appreciative Inquiry Peacebuilding Workshops and again in 2009 as co-organizer of the Appreciative Inquiry World Conference, which was held in Kathmandu. All in all, I've lived and worked in Nepal for 13 years.

FoN: How did you get interested in the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) project? Were you one of the people who came up with the idea or did you latch on to it later?

Mac: In the mid-1990's, I was with the Mountain Institute, an NGO that partners with mountain people in the Himalayas, the Andes, North America and Africa to transform their livelihoods, protect their cultures and conserve vital natural resources. I returned to Nepal in 1994 to work with Brian Peniston (another Nepal RPCV) and Ang Rita Sherpa on the Institute's Makalu Barun Conservation Project, which we helped shape into the Makalu Barun National Park. During this time, we came up with the idea that development of a Himalayan trail could be implemented by local communities themselves. The idea of a trans-Himalayan trekking route had already been floated by others, but most areas along the route don't have the infrastructure to support trekking. We wanted the communities to take charge of this development. We also wanted the economic benefits of tourism to stay in the community rather than only profiting outside trekking and travel agencies. I had co-directed a process through which we successfully helped some communities in the Makalu area do exactly that, so I know the process can work. The GHT concept I'm promoting is to help local communities create their own sections of a cross-Himalayan trekking route. It involves a community development process as well as a hiking trail.

FoN: What about this project excites you...and why do you think it's such a good idea?

Mac: The GHT would create a meandering 1,000 mile conservation corridor across

the 500-mile length of Nepal. It would enhance environmental protection thru ecotourism while increasing local incomes among some of the poorest yet proudest people in the world. It would also provide trekking alternatives for visitors to reduce the extreme pressure on the Annapurna and Everest regions.

FoN: Can the project be considered successful if it's implemented in only parts of Nepal, or does it need full completion?

Mac: It's successful wherever implemented. The route is already designated. It will generate new incomes and enhance conservation for whichever villages participate.

FoN: Mac, you mentioned a methodology called Appreciative Inquiry. In a nutshell, what is it and how have you used it in Nepal?

Mac: Appreciative Inquiry ("AI") is a process that gets stakeholders involved in carrying out their own plans, as well as making and implementing their own decisions by building first on their achievements. If you want to find out more, there's a lot of information about it in books and online. We created our own streamlined, dynamic adaptation of AI in Nepal, calling it Appreciative Planning and Action (APA.)

APA uses 3 basic, easily understood questions that were asked of the people in each community as part of that ecotourism development project:

1. What is working? For example, what are your proudest achievements? What do you love about this village and the natural environment? What do you want your children and grandchildren to know about?

2. What does 'even better' look like? What is your vision of the future of the village for your children?

3. How are you going to get there? Building on your successes, what is your action plan for achieving your dreams? Who is go-

ing to do what, and when? What can we do right now?

The APA process was used by The Mountain Institute in the Makalu Barun area and, more recently, by Partners Nepal in the Solu-Khumbu/Bung area in developing village-based ecotourism and conservation efforts. In the mid-1990's, it was also applied in the Terai region in a five-year women's empowerment program called WORTH, headed by Marcia Odell. It was a literacy and savings micro-enterprise program mobilized for very poor women, those generally earning about \$42 a year. Using the APA process, WORTH helped them develop financial literacy and create their own Village Banks to generate their own loans for starting or expanding small businesses. After Year Three of the five-year program, Nepal's Maoist rebellion forced the program to shut down, and the organizers had to depart Nepal, leaving the women and their 1,500 Village Banks, each with an average \$800 in capital that they had generated through loans to each other for creating their own businesses.

Seven years later, after the rebellion had subsided, a follow-up research project revealed, remarkably, that 62% of the original Village Banks were still functioning. In addition, the women had created 400 more on their own, and their original \$800 fund average was up to \$3,200. There were more women in the program than when the rebellion had caused outside assistance to end! In surveying about how they did this with no business training, the women said they met regularly, shared their stories and ideas, and started every meeting by highlighting their successes—the core of the APA process. Today, almost 20 years later, the village banking groups have formed federations and co-ops, and some of the women are serving in parliament or as village leaders. The energy, success and proven sustainability of this en-

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deavor, and others like it, will be leveraged by the Great Himalaya Trail Project.

FoN: COVID-19 has created a serious health and economic crisis in Nepal. What impact does the pandemic have on planning for continued development of the GHT?

Mac: Certainly the economic impact is devastating across the entire country, but especially in remote and rural areas. Tourism is dead and will be in trouble for some time. Economic prospects of people along the GHT are particularly dire, since there are few resources to fall back on. In addition, climate change and environmental degradation have exacerbated landslides, flooding, and glacier melt, further adding to risks for lives, property, and livelihoods.

The situation is definitely tragic, but there are opportunities here as well. The GHT project presents a low-cost, highly-effective initiative that can bring major economic and conservation benefits to poor and vulnerable rural communities in rural trekking areas. My colleague Brian Peniston and I are seeking grant funds to fund the entire project. (Editor's note: See adjoining article for more on this grant proposal.)

However, the planning and pilot phase for this initiative can start immediately, using

Zoom, internet and phone communications that will keep initial costs down while ensuring pandemic safety. This phase will be led, managed, and conducted by an existing, in-place network of experienced Nepalese Appreciative Inquiry practitioners, conservation leaders and eco-tourism specialists. Brian and I would provide facilitation and advisory support via Zoom, but it does not require our physical presence, thus eliminating international travel expenses from the budget. We are hoping that this pilot implementation will pave the way for successful and sustainable expansion among the hundreds of remote communities along the entire GHT.

FoN: Going beyond GHT, what do you think is necessary for a project like this to be successful in a developing country?

Mac: GHT is an initiative that was originally conceived together with Nepali colleagues. It is "grass roots" in the sense that it is directed and managed by the people who live in communities along the trail. They have the unique skills and experience to make decisions and implement the project on their own.

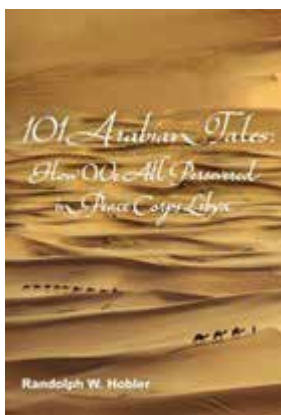
In this sense the projects like this are "anti-colonial" too because we as westerners are in supportive, rather than directive, roles. This makes it more likely that the projects

will be empowering and self-sustaining as participant communities pursue their own priorities and adapt to changes that inevitably occur in a local area over time. It also makes it more likely that similar development will occur, not only in near-by communities when people see benefits occurring where it has already been implemented, but also replicated in other initiatives around the world.



Photo by Dave Carlson, N-3 (Courtesy Nepal Photo Project)

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Then and Now

BY KEITH CUNNINGHAM

Keith was a PCV in Nepal in N/14, serving in Ilam as a Jilla Panchayat Overseer from 1967-1969. He and his wife Pat, who was also a Nepal PCV, live in Connecticut.

35 years have passed since I last stepped foot in Nepal. Following two years as a rural construction overseer in the eastern hills, I was trainer, language instructor, regional director, and training director. As a theatre arts college graduate, who would have guessed I'd wind up trying to show villagers how to align roads, construct school buildings, design water supply systems, and dig latrines. But the 1960's were times when BA generalists were thought to be the most flexible and adaptable in the field. Perhaps. Those PCVs with engineering degrees often found the frustrations of working in Nepal, with little technical support or functioning infrastructure, too much to handle. Even for us liberal arts majors, there were plenty of challenges, but we usually managed to roll with the punches. As it turned out, many of the engineering challenges we faced required little more than instinct and 'common sense.'

These days, flashes from the past recur at odd intervals and continue to delight: a solo all-night walk on a dark jungle road from Ilam Bazaar to Bhadrapur in order to catch a plane to Kathmandu; eating what I thought was a chicken drumstick but was actually a duck's head; passing alongside sleeping (no longer living?) bodies lying on the sidewalk as I entered a Calcutta hotel at 2:00 AM on my first entry into India after PST; "stranded" in Darjeeling for 2 weeks before arriving at my post in Ilam due to entry visa problems; the basic Nepal Peace Corps issued provisions: Kelty pack, medical kit, book locker, water filter, iodine tablets; being asked by Ilam neighbors if I would give a neighbor a vasectomy; being teased about using old newspapers for toilet tissue; being scolded by my landlord for inviting an Dalit flute player into my dera; being asked by neighbors if



Keith, a recent photo.

Viet Nam was part of the US; my counterpart's insisting never to put both feet on the same rock at the same time going downhill or across streams in order to stay balanced and avoid "sahib's knee;"...

...my dera walls pasted with countless color photos of the latest US superstar athlete Peggy Fleming; late night listening to BBC and Voice of America, the latter the subject of several PCV letters slamming the fatuous propaganda tone of its broadcasts; Arizona Helicopters pilot Jim Burrell demonstrating a fruitless attempt to stall out a Pilatus Porter STOL as he flew me to my post; having my Honda trail bike lifted onto a bed frame by eager villagers and carried across a high water stream as I stood dumbfounded on the river bank; naked toddlers defecating on the ground in front of me as I ate evening bhat; insidious bed bugs in sleeping bags; akasbani messages to the PC Office disrupted by mattitel shortages and telegraph operators on tea breaks; ongoing concerns about amoebic dysentery and guardia; leeches and blood trails between the toes and elsewhere; construction site checks lasting a week requiring 5-6 hour treks daily; care packages from home that arrived in a solid block when Epoxy Part A and B combined in transit; sundry Darjeeling events: meeting former



Keith in his PCV days in Ilam, working with counterpart Mitra Lal Upadhyaya.

PM BP Koirala and his wife and being invited up to their apartment to chat, spotting Shirley MacLaine in a bookshop, lodging at Mrs. Shaw's guest house and listening to her rave about VIM (India's version of COMET cleanser) and how well it worked as a toothpaste; elephant polo in Chitwan; the world's best yogurt in Bhaktapur once the top fly-covered layer was removed; panicking during a near-death kayaking experience on the Sunkosi; our outdoor wedding in Lazimpat with a chorus of chickens in the background and cutting the wedding cake with a khukuri.

The images I see today of what Nepal has become are startling. Kathmandu Valley pollution appears to have obliterated the once pristine Himal vistas (though COVID-19 has given this situation a temporary reprieve), *pukka* and not so *pukka* roads are cut into hillsides where only foot paths seemed possible, vast paddies have been replaced with new construction, electric lines extend into the remotest areas, and the internet and technology have transformed much of the country. I wonder about such tradeoffs in the name of progress. And I can barely imagine the impact of the current pandemic.

Peace Corps and Nepal have shaped my life in extraordinary ways. In Kathmandu, I married my wife Pat, a former Nepal PCV. We returned with our two young daughters 10 years later to run a PST training program in Bhaktapur and Narayanghat.

KEITH CONTINUED ON PAGE 13

Your Donations At Work

End-of-Project Report for a FoN Grant to Support Four Community Learning Centers

BY KING BEACH, N-60

Through the generosity of your donations, FoN was able to fund Educate the Children in the amount of \$2,500 to improve four village Community Learning Centers in Dolakha District.

Founded in 1989, Educate the Children (ETC) is a Nepal-based NGO focusing on children's education, women's empowerment, and sustainable agricultural development as the three main components of their integrated community development mission. ETC commits to providing services in an area with high need for a period of at least 5 years, and Dolakha is one of those areas.

Dolakha villages are for the most part quite isolated. Most are far from towns of any size, and there are relatively few roads in the district. There is a serious lack of educational resources, with few libraries and very limited internet access. To address the lack of educational resources, ETC established four Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in the communities of Babare, Lapilang, Lamidanda and Leptung.

These CLCs are intended to provide a place where community members can come to access learning resources, such as books, references, continuing education materials and reference materials on cultural and recreational topics. They also provide meeting spaces for small- to medium-size community groups, and are used as such.

Visitors to the CLCs have included community members of all ages, often accompanied by their small children. Over half of those who use the CLCs are women and girls. Visitors enjoy reading materials on a broad variety of topics; among the most popular are "how-to" resources with information about best practices in horticulture and livestock management, income generation, and other topics relevant to their lives.

The CLC management committee in



Champa Thami of Niko Utthan Women's Cooperative reads a book to her child at the Babare CLC (Photo by ETC)

each village is comprised of ETC's women's cooperative members. These women have received special training in committee management and are responsible for opening, closing, and maintaining the facilities, as well as for managing the funds (i.e., collecting contributions and paying rent). With these responsibilities, they benefit from holding public community leadership/service positions in their communities.

FoN's grant provided funding for the purchase and delivery of furniture and additional books for these CLC's. The single-room facilities were set up in pre-existing buildings. The furniture and written materials were purchased in consultation with

each of the CLC management committee's needs and were distributed to the four CLCs in late 2019. Barbara Butterworth, N-7 RPCV and current academic director of Kathmandu University High School, served as the RPCV sponsor for this project.

By the end of March 2020, all four CLC's had shut down temporarily because of the COVID pandemic and the consequent lockdown. Prior to the lockdown (July 2019-March, 2020) the CLCs had received 821 visitors, with 170 women's cooperative members and teachers borrowing materials. The lending of materials to community members has continued during the lockdown, indicating that the CLCs continue to play an important role in the communities despite COVID.

There is every reason to believe that once COVID subsides in Nepal, the CLCs will be there to continue serving their communities in Dolakha District.

Editor's Note: King Beach is a member of FoN's Project Committee and was the lead for this project. You can read the full ETC report of the Community Learning Center Project on our FoN website at <https://www.friendsofnepal.com/cpages/project-reports>. And see more about Educate the Children Nepal on their website: <https://www.etc-nepal.org>.



Women's Group members love reading in the local CLC (Photo by ETC)

Short Items of Interest

Most School Children in Nepal Cannot Access Distance Learning

A recent UNICEF-Nepal report stated that more than two-thirds of Nepal's schoolchildren are deprived of distance learning during the current school closures. There are around 7 million students in the school system from pre-primary to grade 12 levels, studying in 36,000 schools across the country. The Child and Family Tracker Survey carried out among 7,500 households also states that the poorer the household, the less likely it is that children can access or will use distance learning, with only five percent of children in the poorest households having access. You can read the report here: <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/at-least-two-thirds-of-nepal-s-schoolchildren-unable-to-access-remote-learning-during-school-closures-unicef/>

“The Skin of Chitwan” – An Amazing Online Presentation

Doug Hall reports that the Nepal Picture Library and Nepal Photo Circle launched a recent online exhibition called “The Skin of Chitwan” which tells the story of the Tharus of Chitwan and how their lives were disrupted when forests were cleared, DDT was used, new crops and fertilizer brought in. The story is told with audio and video files, text, and many photos, including some by Nepal RPCVs taken from the Nepal Photo Project collection. You can see the presentation at <http://skinofchitwan.nepalpicturelibrary.org/>

Since the presentation uses some very sophisticated web technology, it is best viewed with a full screen computer, not a phone or tablet. Go slowly and be patiently use scrolling to bring photos in from the right, play audios, fade text in & out, etc.

The David Suzuki Foundation

Their mission is to protect nature's diversity and the well-being of all life, now and for the future. You can read about them on their website www.davidsuzuki.org

While not Nepal-specific, you can find some interesting material by putting “Nepal” into the website's search box.



Dashain Time is Ping Time (Photo by Steve Ingraham, N-24. Courtesy of Nepal Photo Project.)

How Dashain Was Celebrated in October In Spite Of COVID-19

Journalist Peter Gill continues to write interesting stories about Nepal. He reports on how the pandemic reshaped all aspect of one of Nepal's most important holidays, from finances to family gatherings to travel. Check out the article here: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/kathmandu-celebrates-dashain-uneasily-amid-covid-19/>

Peter grew up in Nepal as the son of two PCV's who stayed on to live and work there.

KEITH CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Our younger daughter returned 15 years later to study healing practices in the Khumbu region. These days we maintain our Nepal connection with regular visits to local Nepali-run restaurants, resurrecting our rusty Nepali in conversations with eager waitstaff. And *chupal, hisab, bhoj, charpi, jutto, sojho, ramro, topi, hat terikka, jhilimili, agaram bagaram* . . . these terms are now part of our everyday hybrid vocabulary. In addition, for the past 35+ years, a small group of a dozen or so former Peace Corps folks and families who served in Nepal during our time there have gathered every summer at a family retreat on a New Hampshire lake in the White Mountains. “Culture/talent” shows and huge Nepali feasts have always been part of this tradition.

My experiences in Nepal also shaped the trajectory of my career in education through the years. After a graduate degree in American Studies and Cross Cultural Communication, I eventually discovered opportunities that combined teaching, training, performing, and administration as an Arts Director in an urban magnet high school. More than anything, Nepal prepared me to approach these challenges with sensitivity, patience, perseverance, and a realistic vision.

Nepal's impact on my life, and on my world view, has been immense. As a college senior with little idea of what I would do after graduation, a brief chat with an eager Peace Corps recruiter launched me into a vast, unknown odyssey that would influence me for decades. It continues to be a rich and rewarding adventure.

Keith and his guitars have cut a few CDs in recent years, covering folk and blues tunes. They're not available commercially, but if you send him ten bucks, he'll be happy to add his voice and guitar pickin' to your music collection. Email him at kdc1245@gmail.com

Flavors of Nepal: Himalayan Gourmet Cookbook

An Interview with Diana (Oppedal) Russell

BY DUANE KARLEN

Many of us who were Volunteers in the 1960's, 70's and 80's remember a cookbook distributed by PC Nepal called "Himalayan Gourmet." Its green and white cover was probably more familiar to Nepal PCVs than any other book or manual distributed by Peace Corps. And, to those who cooked for themselves, it was an indispensable reference. But whether or not an individual Volunteer actually used it "in the kitchen", it made for interesting reading and brought back nostalgic memories of favorite yummy treats.

After our years of service in Nepal were over, many of us carried the book back to the States, to take a place on a shelf along with the Basic Gurkhali Dictionary (perhaps in similar beat up, dog-eared condition), Where There Is No Doctor, and other mementos of the PC/N experience.

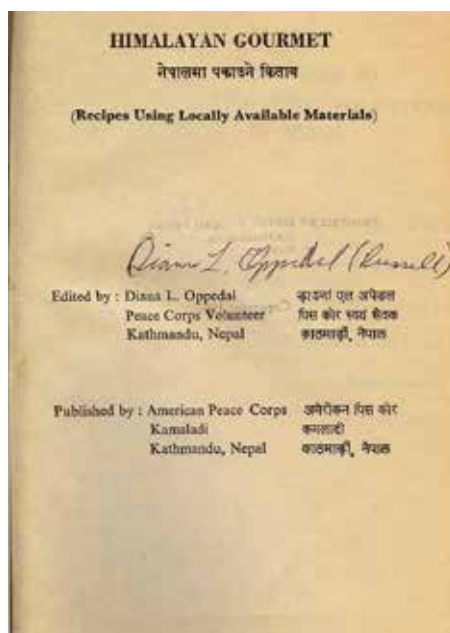
Where did Himalayan Gourmet come from? How did it happen to be written?

Well today we'll find out, as I speak with the person who put it together, Diana Oppedal Russell. She was a Nepal PCV in N/5 (1965-67.) Her story is fascinating!

FoN: Diana, what led you to become a Volunteer in 1965?

DO: My motivation for being interested in Peace Corps was from President Kennedy's challenge to ask what we can do for our country. I didn't have any idea what kinds of jobs Volunteers actually did. All I knew was that Peace Corps Volunteers were sent to help people in other countries, which I thought I'd like to do. So, I took the Peace Corps test.

At the time I was working as a secretary for the US Dept of Agriculture in Washington, DC. I had taken stenography (i.e., typing and shorthand) courses in high school, and being a secretary was a good job for a recent high school grad. One day I got a phone call



asking if I'd like to go to Nepal as a PCV. My first question was, "Where's Nepal?"

I was 19 at the time, and my thought was that this would need to be a "now or never" decision because I would eventually find a career path and be too established in a job to just leave and join the Peace Corps. When I called my parents, they were extremely upset and asked if a parent's signature wasn't required since I was under 21? When I said that wasn't a requirement, they then suggested that I join the military "because the military would take care of me!" (My parents had met when both were in the Navy during WW2). But I wanted Peace Corps, so off I went. Several years later, of course, I did attend college and get a BS degree—I just did it backwards from most people.

FoN: What did you do as a Volunteer in Nepal?

DO: N/5 was the first group of Nepal PCVs to include secretaries. There were two of us in that group, and others joined us later. N/5 consisted of engineers and TEFL teachers, and we all trained together for ten weeks in the spring of 1965 at Southern Illinois University (SIU) in Carbondale. For break-out sessions, secretaries were put with the TEFL group, and this exposure to TEFL came in handy later in my life when I started a volunteer program in Texas teaching English as a foreign language.

After the SIU training, those of us who were secretaries had two more weeks of training in Washington, DC on administrative procedures before continuing on to Nepal. I was assigned to the two doctors in the Peace Corps Medical Office in Kathmandu, and I had a desk with a manual typewriter. I took dictation, typed their letters (mostly to PCVs), kept files, ordered supplies, and sent out items requested by PCVs in the field (big containers of peanut butter, medical supplies such as Paregoric, etc.) I also sometimes accompanied one of the doctors in the chopper when they made visits to PCVs, which allowed me to see them and the places they

Flavors of Nepal Continued

worked.

FoN: What was the inspiration for Himalayan Gourmet, and what led you to choose that name for it?

DO: Although I did tutor a couple of neighbors in English after office hours, I really wanted to find a way to help the other PCVs—especially those out in remote areas. Many of them had never cooked at all, and I was concerned about them. I like to write, so I asked the PC doctors and our Country Director about soliciting recipes from the field and putting together a cookbook that would hopefully be useful to them. They thought this was a good idea, so I sent letters to all the PCVs in the country getting their input. As far as the title goes, it just sort of popped into my head one day, so I went with it.

FoN: In addition to familiar favorites like Chicken Curry (p. 58) and Basic Chocolate Cake (p. 105), there are also some recipes that can only be called “unique” such as Wild Boar Brindalu (p.171) and Naspatti Bonne Femme (p.52). All in all, there are a few hundred recipes, suggestions and descriptions in the book. How did you go about gathering all this material?

DO: Since that was over 50 years ago, I can’t really remember a lot of detail. I vaguely recall having some kind of a cookbook there, possibly brought from the US and/or obtained from a local American missionary group. This may have been where I got things like measurements and some of the supplemental recipes. I do know several PCVs contributed because some recipes are credited to them. Since I’m not really a cook, the helpful tips in the book came primarily from other PCVs or reference books. I liked Walter Martin’s short essay so much that I felt it would be entertaining reading for others and had to be included just as he wrote it. Any diagrams of ovens, etc., came from PCVs. That was long before computers and internet, so there were no search engines to consult.

FoN: How did the book get printed? And what happened that it got taken over by Peace Corps and distributed to PCVs?

DO: The book originated from Peace Corps Nepal, and I worked on it at my desk in the PC office. Although I printed the word “Copyright” beside the year 1967, there was never a copyright actually recorded anywhere. An acquaintance named Purushottam Pande was familiar with the printing company Matri Bhoomi Press in Kathmandu and helped communication with them. Funding came from the Country Director out of the PC budget. And the PC staff delivered copies to PCVs in their regions when making visits. During the time I was in-country, a lot of the PCVs gave positive feedback.

FoN: Do you know how long it was in print and for how many years it was given to PCVs? I know I received it when I went to my site in 1970.

DO: A PC/N Country Director contacted me in the late 1960’s, two or three years after my return to the States, and asked about the copyright because he wanted to get it reprinted, but beyond that I have no idea how many years it was given to PCVs. And although I did work in PC/Washington headquarters for a couple of years after returning to the States, I regretfully lost touch with PCVs and PC staff of Nepal as I pursued a college degree and career opportunities.

FoN: Looking back on the experience of putting it together, how do you feel about it now? What was satisfying about it for you?

DO: Well, creating the cookbook, seeing others stepping up to make it a real team effort, and seeing it published/distributed made me feel like I had actually been able to make a useful contribution to the program. And, as any dedicated PCV knows, that feeling is worth more than any paycheck we can ever get.

Diana still has an original copy of the book, in pristine condition, which she is donating to the Museum of the Peace Corps Experience.

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In Remembrance

Gail Bates

Gail Oberlin Bates passed away in August at the age of 103. Gail was married to Bob Bates, who served as the first Country Director in Nepal from 1962-64. One outcome of this experience was for Gail and Bob to bring a Tibetan refugee from Lhasa to study at the University of New Hampshire, a young woman who became a member of their extended family. As mentioned in her obituary, “upon returning home, Gail and Bob opened their doors and continued to welcome countless students, climbers, Peace Corps volunteers and friends from around the world, always imbuing them with a sense of excitement about the possibilities in life and the belief that they could accomplish whatever they set out to do.”

You can read her intriguing obituary at:

<https://rockandice.com/climbing-news/gail-bates-early-climber-and-adventurer-dies-at-103/?fbclid=IwAR1HVkL6sjEIDsNqwtEaRp5bNIDG2ZJHWcdxXrr7LZc2TolfwXL4U-cInsA>

John Lane

Rev. John D. Lane, 75, was a PCV in Nepal from 1966-68. He died at his home in Staunton, VA in August.

His obituary is at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsleader/obituary.aspx?n=john-d-lane&pid=196721307&fhid=15121>

James Scott

Jim was a PCV in N-1, starting service in 1962. As part of being in this first group he had the privilege of meeting President Kennedy, Sargent Shriver and Willi Unsoeld. He died at his home in Woodland, CA earlier this year.

His obituary is at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/dailydemocrat/obituary.aspx?n=james-w-scott&pid=197107993>

Purita Molina Dayawon

Purita Dayawon was a PCV in Nepal, dates unknown. She passed away in Gainesville, FL on November 12.

Her obituary is at: <https://obits.nj.com/obituaries/jerseyjournal/obituary.aspx?n=purita-molina-dayawon&pid=197131031&fhid=6683>

Steven “Buck” Million

As a PCV in 1970-72, Dr. Million (N-22 or 23) first worked as an agricultural extension agent and later as director of a Nepal viticulture and enology development program. He died in Florida on July 12. His obituary is at: <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/englewood/obituary.aspx?n=steven-million-buck&pid=196612595>



Women on their way to Saturday market (Photo by Beth Prentice/Bob Frank. Courtesy of Nepal Photo Project)



Photo by Al Dieffenbach (Courtesy of Nepal Photo Project)

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DONATE: FoN funds several Nepal grassroots community projects each year through grants selected and administered by FoN’s Project Committee. The funding for these projects comes entirely from donations. Please consider contributing. See membership section below to donate

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INCLUDE FoN IN YOUR WILL OR TRUST: You can name FoN as a beneficiary under the charitable bequest section of your will or trust, stipulating “Friends of Nepal, Jamestown, Rhode Island, www.friendsofnepal.com”. For more guidance on specific language in your state of residency, speak with an estate/will attorney.

NEWSLETTER ARCHIVE: An electronic version of this newsletter, as well as an archive of all the issues for recent years, can be found on our website at www.friendsofnepal.com under the “Stay Updated” tab.

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