

School-Project Bhimkhori and Nepal Guesthouse

I always dreamt of visiting Nepal, the country of which my friend Karl Werker had been talking about for a long time. Adding to this were black and white movies depicting this country with its mystic fog promising numerous adventures. In the beginning, I was uncertain whether this dream ever came true as several thousands of kilometers separated Germany and Nepal and money also was an issue. But finally, in 1994, the dream came true and after a seemingly never-ending flight and full of inner tension, Karl and I arrived at Kathmandu airport

The first Nepalese was not far and I met the Sherpa Karl was praising so much because he was such a reliable person and also because he was more than a guide in the mountains. Complete with a likeable character, this friend waited for us at the airport and started waving from afar:

MANDHOJS

This was the start of our long friendship.

Mandhojs is a kind of self-made man. In spite of low levels of education but blessed with an incredible desire to learn, this son of a farmer taught himself English and led numerous groups of tourists into the mountains of his beloved country. He earned his excellent reputation through training in various agencies and this can easily be seen when joining him on a walk through Kathmandu to see how many friends greet him and have a conversation. This was not to be the one and only tour with Karl and Mandhojs. The virus "Nepal" affected me rapidly and the cordiality of the Nepalese people and the beautiful feeling of being welcome were overwhelming.

Each time, a large group of bearers and a complete team for kitchen work accompanied us on numerous trips to beautiful destinations. We crossed Salpa Pass, icy

AmpuLaptsa, dared to climb Mera up to 6,000 m and mastered seemingly endless detrital mountains as well as green, moist and slippery jungles, got lost in the mountains at night and during fog in the Annapurna region plus we crossed various, dangerous rivers using shaky bridges or icy shelves. But we enjoyed these adventures, in spite of huge exertions and being alone in a freezing tent at night time. Seeing evergreen rice terraces from small planes and constant human contact compensated for all this. I vividly remember a singing contest on a mountain meadow, in which our crew competed with porters of another group: in total darkness, with the magnificent starry sky above the Himalaya, the group sang my favourite Nepalese song "Resham Firiri" that you can also hear in the background of this website, and Mandhojs translated this love song into English for me. There was nothing that our friend Mandhojs did not try to make possible. Even if he had been too premature a few times in saying "yes, it is possible, Sir" (we had to break his habit of saying Sir) and we anticipated that the it would not work as planned, we never had bad feelings if it did not.

How things progresses

In 2006, my travel partner changed. Karl-Josef Werker started eyeing other destinations so that my wife Gisela joined me, however I attempted to take things slowly to allow her not to be frightened. In showing my wife, I suddenly saw a lot more of beautiful Kathmandu valley myself. I absorbed significantly more as we started our excursions from Kathmandu, wandering through streets and villages, having fun but also seeing a lot of misery. In contrast to earlier trips, I could see things through my wife's view and I saw things differently.

We were very close to the people and also experienced Dashain -festival. The Nepalese people have many festivals

(probably the highest number in the world) and they know how to celebrate these accordingly.

On a visit to the Annapurna region, where we also handed over donations to a local school, we got to know Mandhojs family that lived in Bhimkhori in the Mahabharat mountain range. We drove there using public buses because this is the only way to be close to the people.

Passing old royal cities up to Banepa and after changing buses in Mamti, the small village along the road, we arrived at a impressive detrital field with tiny rivers. Here, the bus stops several times per day and we started our ascent to Mandhojs farm, however not before having had a cup of tea whilst the villagers watched us curiously. We were enthusiastic about the scenery and the valley that we left behind, the lovely people in the village that always wanted to help us. We liked it here and I told Mandhojs that farmers in Germany offer holidays on a farm in order to complement their income. He somehow found this interesting but this was it for the time being. Seeing how openly we have been welcomed by Mandhojs family, saying good-bye hurt a bit and we regretted not to be able to stay longer.

Mandhojs stroke of fate

As always, we sent many letters after our return to Germany and I did not anticipate what lay ahead for our friendship when I received a letter from Mandhojs son Shyam on May 3rd 2007, informing me that Mandhojs was in hospital suffering from ambilateral renal failure and that survival seemed impossible. His final lines were: "My father said this is my last mail from life of Mandhojs. Please uncle this message also sent to the Mr. Karl and his family."

This came as a shock and tears started streaming down my face. I started thinking of what could be done – there is no health insurance in Nepal and hospitals are organised privately. Help was required very quickly as Mandhojs' state deteriorated daily. After more mails from Shyam, it became

clear that the only chance for survival was kidney transplantation in India. Mandhojs' family had started borrowing money from everywhere. Simultaneously, we began collecting donations with the help of my wife and Karl, finding many donators among our relatives, friends and colleagues. I also contributed prize money of 500 Euro that I won in a quiz with a Cologne radio station. I still believe today that only my firm intention of giving the money to Mandhojs led to my win. In the final stages of collecting money, my son introduced me to the Managing Director of Mayersche Buchhandlung, a local bookstore in Cologne. Being a Nepal supporter and chairman of a Nepal initiative himself, donating money was not possible but we were able to purchase diaries showing photos of Nepal at cost so that selling these at regular prices led to healthy profits. After these efforts and in the belief that everything will turn for the better, Mandhojs overcame surgery and has found back to his old life, after a longer period of post-operative recovery. Our collection of money even meant that the family is now clear of all debt.

New problem and a solution

Soon after returning home, it became apparent that Mandhojs would not be able to work as a guide anymore, meaning that he could not secure the livelihood of his family (of a total of seven children, three girls still live at home and Shyam, being the second-oldest son, is studying with my financial support in Kathmandu where he is also living most of the time). Selling milk from the farm is not sufficiently lucrative as to offer the desired good perspectives to all children. At this point, my old thought about holidays on a farm awoke and Mandhojs was excited about it. This would allow him to stay at home but still earn money. The problem for the execution of this plan was that the existing space was not sufficient for guest to stay. After thinking this through, I asked for pricing of local housing and I sacrificed

my entire savings and our tax returns and gave the signal for our “Nepali house” in January 2008 so that the monsoon usually starting in June was not to be the enemy in building the house. Now, early September 2008, I can assess that the house is constructed in large parts and we are already contemplating furniture.

Luckily, we managed to finish the main tasks before the monsoon became too strong, however construction of the separate toilet and shower house has been heavily affected but this is now also finished and final touches are being made. Mandhojs’ active work and organisational skills have helped a lot in building the house whilst I am working on getting as many people as possible excited for a holidays in the Mahabharat-Range. The house, profits of which have been agreed to go to Mandhojs’ family, is not only intended to secure Mandhojs’ income and thus his children’s education but also to bring a boost and further income to the entire village of Bhimkhori, situated in the Kavre province. Interest in local lifestyles and culture has grown significantly and also the local school is interested in our projects (please also see the link “donations”). And seeing the location here, with the fantastic view East into the valley, being woken by the Sun rather than an alarm clock, with numerous opportunities for excursion and integrated into the village community, it is simply beautiful to live here.

Please assist to give Nepal help for self-help. What can be better than helping by making holidays? Rouse curiosity to get to know a special people and have exciting meetings. Experience a flourishing country with incredible diversity and the beauty of gigantic mountains. I am certain you will not regret coming to our Nepali house and to take in this mystic country. Your stay secures employment and thus the existence of families. You also support education and therewith job prospects of people.

Earmarked donations are always welcome. Not only will 100% be used for the intended purpose but will also be

documented for you. Please contact me for more information. Friends of Nepal are a strange kind of people and this makes me believe in the success of this project. Continue following this site. I attempt to keep it up-to-date and also to present new photos on a regular basis. I would greatly appreciate your entry into our guestbook and any suggestions and comments.

Namaste

Laura Schaldach