

Ghar Sita Mutu - House With a Heart

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

JUNE 2008

Freezing temperatures and smiling faces greeted me on my return to Nepal in February, along with many problems to solve. Staff changes, petrol shortages, election fears and electricity outages for 11 hours a day were challenging. The power shortage actually led us to introduce a new training program for our women – candle making.

We were able to start the candle making training because we were given a second grant from **The Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation**. This enables us to expand our women's training programs and pay our trainees for another year. A big thank you to them for their belief and support of our program. Last year we started making felt with the first grant they made to us.



Candle making is a new program in the women's training program.

For those of you who have asked about how the felt is made, here's a rough idea. The raw dyed wool is first cleaned and then laid out flat on a large table. A net is put on top and then it is rubbed with hot water and soap. Very slowly and methodically, and little by little, more felt is added and pressed down until the desired thickness is reached. The felt is then rinsed, spun and dried. If a particular shape is desired, we use linoleum patterns, and the wool is pressed around it.

The women who take our training classes continue to blossom. They come in the morning with a smile and have less tension on their faces than before. Most of these women have no one to count on – no family or support group, and it is good to see them become more confident, self-sufficient and independent. We are striving to meet Fair Trade standards. We do, of course, pay fair salaries and have now just bought a kettle and stove so the women can have tea and biscuits. We are planning to make a shaded area where trainees can sit and sew outside.

This spring was very busy and productive. The biggest job was planning for and digging and laying the pipes from our septic tank through the garden, then through the wall and into the next field (newly ours) and onto the road. We did it! It was a job well organized by **Hem Rai**, who was recently promoted to Co-manager along with **Rajina Banepali**. Rajina is doing a wonderful job looking after the children and running our training program, as well as giving dance classes every Saturday.

We also undertook other construction projects. We built a food storage room adjoining the house, which frees up one bedroom for additional children. A classroom was constructed underneath the library, and atop the old septic tank we put two toilets with a covered bike shed/kennel attached.



The sewer project on our new plot of land is nearing completion. Our wall and library are in the background of this photo.

We gave the goats we raised to the woman who carried our bricks and mixed the mortar for our construction project. With the help of **Birendra Singh**, we sent goats to the rural Terai region to replace ones lost in the floods of last year as part of our goat program aimed at raising the standard of living for impoverished rural families.

Because some of our children have suffered traumatic pasts, we consulted a child psychologist, **Dr. Gunga Pathak**, who was extremely helpful. She took us to visit several children's homes that she works with and also

gave us many new ideas on how to work creatively with our children. All the children and staff (me too) took psychological tests. Most of our kids are emotionally troubled, and all of them now receive counseling. We spent a very worthwhile \$600 on a ten-day staff training program conducted by **Dr. Pathak** and **Uma Shrestha**, founders of the Nepal Institute of Psychology. We all feel more able to face our daily challenges and are grateful to both of them for their efforts.

VISITORS

Sharon Jane Smith visited us in February from New York City, and her calm presence inspired us all. The children enjoyed mandolin lessons with her and will continue to practice on the instrument she kindly donated. Our basketball players enjoyed the games she organized with other children's homes and are slowly learning to be good losers.

March brought the good weather and a month-long school holiday. Thanks to the generosity of **Fred Ripley** and **Noel Faulkner**, we were able to buy some bikes for the children, and Noel was kept busy when he arrived repairing them all. Unfortunately, the quality of the bikes available is not very good, and it is difficult to find replacement parts. On my next visit I plan to take nuts, bolts and washers, along with a few sets of brakes.

Barbara and **Raquel** visited us from Ibiza and spent a busy two weeks teaching our new cook how to make bread, cake and some new rice and vegetable dishes. Along with some of the children, they painted a lovely mural in our library. We celebrated World Peace day with a full moon picnic supper of homemade pizza and chocolate covered bananas – a treat we will all long remember.

In April **Sylvie Montez** came back to Ghar Sita Mutu with many new ideas for our felt making program. The puppets continue to be popular, and we now have several designs for a puppet holder that goes on the wall. See the ad on page 3 if you're interested in purchasing a puppet or other product made by the women.



The Ghar Sita Mutu children enjoyed playing on basketball teams organized by Sharon Jane Smith (shown far right).

A Success Story

Ambika, one of our early trainees, seemed unable to learn any skills, even after a whole year of paid sewing training and six months of felt making training. We gave her a chance to make candles, and I'm happy to report that not only did she learn to make them quite easily, but also, after we bought her a candle mold and a supply of wax, she has been able to give up begging at Boudhanath Stupa. She now sells her homemade candles and is supporting her own family. The proud smile on her face was a great reward for our persistence.



Ambika, front row second from left, is shown here with members of her candle making class.

ORGANIZATION GROWTH

I'm very excited about the many changes taking place at Ghar Sita Mutu, and I'd especially like to thank **Lisa Hartmann** and **Alexa Doering** for their help in New York and for taking care of things whilst I'm in Nepal. We are working to expand and strengthen our organization by formally planning for the future with a strategic plan and also are thinking about forming our own non-profit 501(c)3. Currently, the Candy Jernigan Foundation for the Arts is our fiscal sponsor for which we continue to be most grateful.

We're professionalizing operations at our home and centre in Nepal with the help of a volunteer consultant **Christy McFall**, who is helping us put together procedures and guidelines including personnel policies and incident reports. Christy works in Nepal as the Operations Manager for a non-profit in the field of women's reproductive health.

Janice Kosman is also volunteering for us in Nepal, working to expand and improve our Learning Centre and plan our curriculum. She is currently the Vice-Principal at a Nepali owned school in Kathmandu.



The parents of these children cannot afford school tuition. Our Children's Learning Centre provides them with a free education in reading, writing, and math. Twenty-six children attend daily classes funded in part by the **Don Splawn Foundation East**.

EXPANSION PLANS / PARTIES & FUNDRAISERS

Plans are also in the works to expand the children's home to allow for more children to come and live with us. We were encouraged to start formal planning after meeting some of our donors at a Chicago reception held on June 5 at the lovely home of **Thomas MacEntee** and **George Arvanites**. Thanks to them for letting us use their space, and many thanks to **Bob and Lisa Hartmann** for hosting the event. I had been looking forward to meeting the Chicago area donors to thank them personally for their support and was lucky to also be invited to another interview on Chicago Public Radio's **Worldview** program hosted by **Jerome McDonnell**. I am most grateful to Jerome and *Worldview* listeners for donating almost

\$58,000 since our first interview aired approximately five years ago. Last April Ghar Sita Mutu was included in the first ever Global Activism Expo presented by Chicago Public Radio, where we were represented by **Bill Andrews**. Many thanks, Bill.

On my way back from Nepal in May I stopped over in London for my first ever fundraiser in England. **Ruth Montlake** very kindly organized a luncheon party for her friends in her lovely garden in honour of Ghar Sita Mutu, and I met many wonderful new supporters. Many thanks to Ruth and my sisters **Rita Weiner** and **Georgina Palmer** for their hard work and support, and to all who attended for their generosity and kindness. Part of the \$1,200 we raised from this party will be used to buy new beds and blankets for the children this winter.



Beverly has been featured four times on Chicago Public Radio's *Worldview* program for her work with Ghar Sita Mutu. She's shown here (far right) in the Chicago studio with host Jerome McDonnell & producer Nissa Thompson. Go online to www.gharsitamutu.org for a link to the interview.

Puppets Available!

You can purchase handcrafted products made by the women in Ghar Sita Mutu's Women's Training Program





- A Repeat Performance, 156 First Ave, NYC
- Om Yoga, Union Sq., 826 Broadway, 6th Flr, NYC
- Rubin Museum Shop
150 W 17th St, NYC
- Tibet House
22 W 15th St, #2
- Online at www.BambinoLand.com

Many thanks to **Bryn Benson** and her son **Ian Iyengar** who recently threw a fundraiser for us at the Curry Hut in Highwood, IL. Fifteen-year-old Ian has been raising funds for us by giving workshops on the making of instruments from recycled objects. We appreciate your efforts, Ian.

We are looking for people to help raise funds by throwing a party for their friends. I can supply a slide show and, depending upon the location, may be able to attend. We also are in real need of donated office space in New York. The files are taking over my apartment, and we need a space for interns and volunteers to work.

The Maoists won the recent election and Nepal is now a democratic Republic. The new government faces many pressing problems, but the mood is optimistic. The fuel shortage will be the first big test, as queues for petrol, gas, and kerosene clog the roads and footpaths of Kathmandu. Food prices have risen dramatically. I just received an e-mail from one of our managers asking for additional funds to cover the 40% rise in monthly food costs.

Turning children away and fundraising are the two most difficult parts of running Ghar Sita Mutu. I am most grateful to all of you who have donated in the past, and hope you know that your support continues to be a crucial part of our success.

Hope to see you at our annual bash in December in New York City. Many thanks again from me and all the children of Ghar Sita Mutu. All the best, Beverly

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 running and 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.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND



Babu & Krishna, ages 2 & 5

My name is Beverly Bronson. I own a small antiques shop, A Repeat Performance, in New York City. Eight years ago while working as a volunteer in Nepal, I found two abandoned children, Babu and Krishna, 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. We moved into our own home in 2004. I split my time between New York and Nepal.

Ghar Sita Mutu
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New York, NY 10011

We're updating our
website frequently.
Check it out!
www.gharsitamutu.org



Printing and distribution of the newsletter is courtesy of Bryn Benson and the Lake Forest College Visual Communications Department.