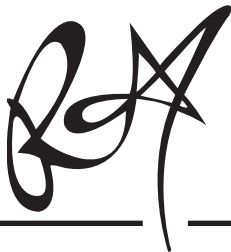


# R Star Foundation **UPDATE** **Beyond Our Visions!**



## Back from Nepal with stories to tell!

### Greetings!

Namaste as said in Nepal most especially.

What a trip it was. I went to do our usual work with Rabindra ready in Nepal to go forward with 200 more goats to gift to 2 more villages with micro-financing, which we did and nearly 50 more goats. My trip was nearly 2 months long so as to achieve seeing every village we work with, 41 and growing. This was well coordinated by Rabin, though of course we had to alter timing with his being ill, then just past the midpoint of my visit, me getting ill with the pandemic flu too. But we did it!

To achieve seeing all the villages, we had to hurry in and out yet make sure we had the pleasure of contact being meaningful to everyone. How I wished to linger, but we could not. On this journey we didn't stay overnight in the villages as much as we have on past trips. Being a husband and father prompted this and was afforded by

Rabin's new, better motorcycle, and my, it was hard all the same.

Each day we took off for the villages we took the pulse of the political situation for our safe passage. Nepal is without a Constitution in place presently. Perhaps because of the communists now ruling the country during the between time of a constitution being agreed to by the country, the volatility remained in place with rumors and threats? The lack of stability, safety has been so of our past trips. It was different this time, not better. I am glad to say we heard the threats and saw the near daily show of communist strength to do a total take over, yet we were able to carry on without interruptions as we have experienced on past trips by road blocks and being detained for questioning. Life is not close to stable or safe in Nepal by any stretch of the imagination.

One day we were in '6' villages. In the past, doing 3 villages would leave

us fully exhausted. The improvement for movement came about because of the major road we use being improved being wider, paved rather than chunky dirt, thick dust, pits and narrow as in the past. The other reason for our able-ness, Rabin's new (red) motorcycle being far more capable to maneuver the roads at a better speed with the larger engine and comfort for both of us. He drove us both to places we used to walk to. Better equipment helped us enormously to spend less time on the road.

Most of you received a post card we made in Nepal as we did the work. That was interesting to attempt. To make post cards here, easy enough with agreements met, even done on line. We were hard pressed to get a quality paper, the dead-line was missed not once but 3 times, but we did it. I will note here that the photo used at the Pahari Village is unlike any of our villages. They are

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## An interview with Bhagawati Situala-Wojetar, Vice-President of a group we oversee.



**Bhagawati Situala-Wojetar**

### **What year did you join in the R Star groups with goats or literacy or cottage industries?**

I joined the goat project in the year 2003/4 and cottage and literacy in 2008 and 2010

### **Is there emotional value to you by being joined in groups as you are, mixed with all casts?**

Oh yes. At first I didn't know that we all are women and that is our (true) caste, but now we do have such feeling, we are heard and we can speak out for the betterment of women in our community.

### **Has the work with the goats/groups and micro-financing improved your life? The lives of your family?**

Yes, a lot and still improving our living. I also won cash prize for raising goats in 2005/6.

### **If yes, HOW and WHAT are the changes you, your family have benefited from? How many in your family?**

Well, the first change is I have a group. Otherwise, I have been living single (which is hard for women in Nepal.) Well, goats gave more goats and I earned a lot as my side income besides agriculture (work) and it made me easy (life easier), to live and we always have fund if in case of an emergency, which we never had before. I am also respected as a vice-president of the group. We practiced true democracy in our group by electing our leaders. In my current family we are four but my son, daughter-in-law and grandson lives in Lalitpur. I can also read, write and calculate at this age of my life. I never thought that I could ever be able to do so. I am now 70 years old. I have a job to look after grandchild of our project goats. I like it. Thanks to you and Sister Rosalind.

### **Is there anything you would like to share beyond these questions?**

Well, you know and you've seen everything . What else to share? Tell Sister Rosalind that we miss her a lot and we pray for her. We hope to see her as frequently as before. She is courageous and encouraged all of us. She has done such a thing for us, which no one would do. Hugs to her he...hee...heeh. (She is shy as she was at the time you had a forced a hug to her as normal as you culture, but not to ours.

clearly the poorest of our villages. Their water supply is only what falls and is collected; their agricultural limited to corn and a grass used to make brooms they sell. It is a meager existence where abundance is absent in general in Nepal. Only recently did the Pahari's get the government to bring in electricity and deny them water being pumped to them. I was absolutely the first foreigner ever to enter their village. What an honor. Hopefully I didn't frighten them too greatly in my strange attire and advanced age.

The access to the Pahari village is extra perilous. It is atop the ridge of a steep mountain range. The views are great, but growing space is highly limited. We went up the steep, narrow dirt road. We had to lean to the left, hang to the mountain or fear falling over some 2000 feet by any error made on the drive. Rabin's adeptness puts me at total ease, but he was sweating regardless of how cold it actually was. The ride up the road took an hour from the lower village we departed to get there.

We talked with the lovely Pahari villagers for a couple of hours, agreeing to see them again when the gifting village would bring them their goats. I took photos of everyone present with delight and ease. They were easy to smile. The women stayed a bit distant from me initially, but as the time passed, they were coming forward to meet me. I smile as I recall meeting them. They are all one caste with the exception of one Tamang. Not sure why that is, but I know the Pahari's are the smallest of the tribes of Nepal. Quite unique.

The day we visited 6 villages Rabin didn't share with me what we were doing. We stopped at a closed business in Banepa. I thought we were getting some tea and a wee rest? Wrong. We were there to see a new (registered with the government), sewing cooperative. (We were served tea by the ladies.)

What makes the story remarkable is we had a failure with a sewing collaborative we did 3 years back. We had 10 women who wanted the training in the selected village the agency joined with us would go to. The training was 10 weeks and each woman got a free treadle sewing machine. What none of us knew at the time, the women couldn't all start a business which would support them, which was certainly part of the equation of the sewing collaboration, self sufficiency with a skill. There were 6 sewing machines not being used as 10 sewing businesses couldn't be supported in the village. Oops.

Ram-Devi, a woman I met on my second trip to Nepal, asked for the 6 fallow machines to start a collaborative. What a mover and shaker she is. We of course gifted them to her as she is a woman I truly trust to improve the country by actions I have seen her involved with through the years. She is the woman who got

us our first International Award at the end of 2009. She understands our work too.

What we saw at the stop was the cooperative in action...that is once the women returned from weddings they were attending before a call went out to them to share we were there to see them. Wedding season often finds us short of all the people in a village.

All of a sudden the shop was open. The roll up door lifted to a store front displaying materials to select, and the developing spice business bags to sell. There is an area behind the store front with our 6 machines plus two more. The machines were nested together with no space between; the chairs had no backs, the light was either natural or if lucky to have electricity in the day with a single naked light hung above. Poor conditions, but how happy the women were with what they created to lift their lives.

I met each woman...hugged and was hugged tightly over and over again as we are credited with the 6 machines. Some I had met from other village meetings. They were thanking Rabin and me for joining with them to make their lives totally different. I didn't understand? What were they excitedly saying?

Rabin finally explained these women were tossed out of their homes with nowhere to go, no one to tend to their needs as village women do not have paying jobs...death looming! Yes, one woman shared her story how she was beaten during her married life by her mother-in-law, then when her husband died, she was tossed out with the agreement of her very own son. Now she could take care of herself because of the cooperative. She shared how she loved her life because of her chance to continue by her own merits as a talented sewer of garments she was commissioned to sew. Imagine the



One of the women with her sewing machine.

smile on her face as we saw.

Let me step back to explain no one lives alone in Nepal, certainly not women. These women all were making incomes to live alone, and they liked it. They liked their independence to buy their own food,

to pay their own rent and have a happy life by their own choices; once again singing and being joyful with the opportunity they felt gifted to them for happiness.

As common in Nepal, a blessing is given with Tika on the forehead. They not only placed it on my head, but they covered my hands with it. I admit, I was not pleased because I did not know the significance of their actions being to honor me as a living goddess. Naturally that wouldn't enter my thinking. (The same thing happened in another village to which Rabin celebrated as it sure means we are well respected and regarded. My original disdain has only to do with how the red powder stains my clothing, gets in my eyes and colors my natural hair color for days).

Every woman had a story to break our hearts, but stories which have happy ending with their being in the cooperative. Add to this, these discarded women were increasing the opportunities for other women tossed to the street; nearly ready to buy 15 machines and start in another city about 40 minutes away. Not only were they recreating their own lives, they were all into helping other women in equal plights. I tell you true that my heart was about to jump out of my body by hearing how a failure became an incredible success, far beyond our visions. 6 fallow machines started fresh lives better than the women had had before the failure. We also learned never to bring as much training to one village, rather a few women for the same training with a couple or more villages added to spread it out better.

Every village we saw that day touched us both. One village a day could have kept us at the same level of excitement, but imagine 6 different villages by many women telling their stories? Powerful.

We were exhausted by the time we returned to Kathmandu late that night. Rabin dropped me to my simple hotel where I took a hot bath to rid the deep dust plastered on me from the ride over the roads, let alone the tika blessings. I was lit up with the exuberance by the day in the villages. Rabin had a drive of another 45 minutes to get home to his late dinner and dear family.

Another sewing cooperative was shown to us in Palanchok, the first passing-the-gift village to be gifted years back. Also an extremely poor village at a high altitude. Their sewing conditions were not as good as the Banepa women's sewing cooperative. They only had 2 sewing machines which the women purchased with the funds they earned from selling of the extra goats each season. They were determined to place their newly earned funds to expand their opportunities, and they are.

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The floor of the 2nd sewing cooperative, dirt. Again no real lighting beyond the 2 hours of electricity by the naked bulb on the ceiling and 2 windows. No heat, no stimulation beyond finding a way to support their own lives as well as their families. The women were all thrilled for the opportunity to have a job, a way to earn an income otherwise denied to them in the past. They are in process to get their certification for having a registered cooperative with the government which protects them all.

These stories to me show how giving a hand-up brought creative thinking and action to come about, ways to improve well beyond what we offered them with the goats and micro-financing, even collaborations we connected to

them as we found them. Now that was in our vision, improvement beyond what we gift, but never have we known how the women would do it, we just believed they would. I am amazed and delighted as I am sure you are with reading about what the women created. Truly, truly remarkable! What will be seen next I wonder? It will be good, I am sure. Some of our projects grow without our doing a thing beyond connections to the villagers, and in some cases, not even that. We have stirred their imaginations!

We do have more than 14,000 goats credited to our work in fewer than 10 years. We do not have any paid employees, but we have generous donors and volunteers on both sides of the world. Our expenses are often underwritten, but regardless, never large. Be pleased that you are gifting your funds directly to the work as we are presenting in this update, and those gifts have grown well beyond our visions.

We did implement a 'hanging' garden' at the school. It is not at all perfect or perfected...yet. We were met with the Agricultural Department stating plants will'n't grow as we shared with them what we were starting. We did it anyway. The instructions as I gave were somewhat ignored, but they will be righted. The purpose of the garden hanging is space being unavailable to grow diversified crops because of so little flat land; getting different foods in their seasonally same yearly diets are not looked at what-so-ever. The hanging gardens can be a means to alter what has been so for over 5000 years. My idea was to use a small area on the ground by the school, building something like a clothes line to hang the potted plants. Rabin put me straight reminding me the goats and other animals would eat the plants



A plastic bottle dump truck entertains a village boy. Note his bare feet in the dead of winter.

before they could mature.

Instead we have the plants on top of the school roof in an area which is not used. The children and teachers did the planting along with Rabin. They used, used water bottles with the bottoms cut out, good soil placed in the containers, and cord around the bottles tied around the upside down bottles tied to a line; the drain being

the spout with the lid removed. I have no doubt a few crops will fail, but I also know it will work as they see the possibilities I have seen functioning on a research trip I made to the Philippines a few years back. I suggest that in time we will see plants growing out of vessels on the house walls in time, even if herbs only, though with

their love of flowers, those too.

Rabin's sharp mind was to tell the children to do some growing at home, and bring in their plants at a time he designated which then he would give a 'reward' for the best plants to the winning child. In truth, all those who participate will get a prize. Rabin understands what motivates the children while also introducing the idea directly to the families. We are sure to have great success with new ideas appearing from this alone. Between us, we have made a good idea far better, more reaching.

Regarding the school: Our children are passing the government testing with ease. We have competent teachers; generally women during weather seasons the women can enter and exit. (A building for the women would have to be built to have the women fulltime on the property). On this trip we gifted 3 Kindles already loaded with Western Classics by our young intern Tessa Woodall as I shared in our last newsletter, over- seen by her teacher mom, Betsy. Only appropriate reading material, age related got uploaded.

Rabin never told me he didn't know what I was talking about with Kindles for the 6 months I chatted about getting them for our library, state of the art electronics ready to go. Only when I arrived in Kathmandu and handed him a Kindle did I understand he knew NOTHING of them let alone how they worked or would serve the children



One of the teachers with a new Kindle.

so largely. His assignment was to locate a store selling the Kindles so as to learn how to operate them so he could train the teachers. Guess what? There are no such stores there at this time, nothing he could locate if they do exist. I didn't know how to teach the use of the Kindle, so I went on line and told Rabin to read up on how to use them and then come up and wake me from my needed nap as exhaustion had grabbed me.

What happened when Rabin came into my room was soul satisfying. His eyes were filled with light and excitement with what our generous donors had given to our children. He told me to give him the Kindle; then he showed me how to do this, that and the safety of the Kindle with how to handle it, recharge them. He fully understood and was eager to get them in the teachers' hands for the children.

The teachers were excited when they were introduced to the Kindles and as big eyed as Rabin had been when he understood what they would do for the children and their learning. They got it! They are now happily reading in English, stories to the children each day which will improve the teachers and of course the students use of English while being entertained by the stories read to them.

The Kindles help to bring our children into the world of electronics with the language internet has set, English, by this project with Kindles. WOW! Now we are looking on how to get more Kindles, about 55 more, so that each child will have use of a Kindle at all times, school and home (which means families of the students will benefit too when the kids practice reading and sharing after class). Anyone out there who knows how to do that? Contact me. Meantime we continue to request new Kindles be gifted to us; we will load them and deliver them there with various couriers and friends to get them in use immediately.

When time permitted, I had the delightful pleasure to interview women on how our projects for them have served and worked. The husbands

also joined in. Truth? 100% of all the village members I asked to talk on video spoke excitedly of the changes they experienced since they joined with us. I don't speak Nepali, so those I chose were not at all selected because I knew first how they would respond. I was asking so as to learn, to correct things where needed; and learn we did. I am grateful daily for you all getting us

to such success in our world for the poorest of the poor by the support given be it past or currently.

We are currently working to get the interviews off the videos taken so

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as to place them on our website. We continue to take written interviews, but those are slower to get translated and posted to me. We are super proud to know how well our work continues forward in favorable directions to benefit the entire villages, the women directly and to the pleasure of their husbands too. Did I say how we have been touched on this trip by our many successes? Even our failures have become success stories? Huge!

Just a quick note on how our Peace Flag work goes: Well. The children in Nepal enjoy the flags in their classrooms which is referred to as total immersion; they enjoy making flags to send with me to students and others as they do reflect on what to share as peace. We are partnered with other schools in Nepal to make the flags for which their teachers appreciate our efforts for peace in the world. We will be broadening our peace work as we can between the other works we have in place. We do have a continuous streaming of our flags on our website should you be interested.

More photos pertaining to the stories I haveshared are on our web to view: [www.RStarFoundation.org](http://www.RStarFoundation.org). More details of our ongoing work will be found there as well. We continue to look for volunteers

to host small teas, or wine and cheese parties to get our efforts out and seen for those who will be interested in any State or city.

Have other ideas which will help us help others in Nepal? Share them with us. Give me a call or email. We grow our grand, successful actions with help such as my able Board does too.

Be sure to know where your donations to R Star Foundation go. We are a 501© 3 charity and all donations are tax deductible. (EIN# 83-0442006) R Star Foundation has no paid employees; all work is done by volunteers; we have an extremely high percentage of funds used for our programs versus



*Just sharing what we have done with the lovely peace flags. These hang in the classrooms for the children to be immersed in PEACE thoughts all day, every day.*

operational costs. We do not sell or share our donor's names to other groups or to anyone. Our fund-raising is much harder in these trying economic times while the villages reaching to us has never been greater. With the help of supporters we are still able to meet our goals of making a difference which is aimed at women and children, but certainly extends to the men and villages. We are grateful for all donations to R Star Foundation which enables us to continue the work we have been doing in Nepal since the end of 2003. We depend on you. Visit us at [www.RStarFoundation.org](http://www.RStarFoundation.org). You may unsubscribe if you no longer wish to receive our emails by replying in the subject line accordingly. Thank you!



**OUR WISH LIST:**

- New **Kindles** with the attachments for our school to use as a 'library'.
- An **iPad**
- **Speaking opportunities**, i.e. service clubs, radio and/or cable shows.

*Please call 949.497.4911 or email us at [rstar@pacbell.net](mailto:rstar@pacbell.net)*

**Meet Connie Gilland, a member of our Board of Directors**



**Currently living the idyllic life of Laguna Woods, CA  
Retired nurse, mother of 3 fine sons.  
Attended the University of Kansas as a nursing major.**

Gardening has been one of my favored hobbies as well as reading. Political matters are one other area of my current interest as well. I have always enjoyed volunteer service having been joined with these in the past:: Vista Volunteer (Big Brothers Big Sisters); Boy Scouts of America. I served on the Board of Directors for the Campfire Boys and Girls.

While working as a nurse, I was Nurse Coordinator for the American Red Cross Disaster Relief, Columbia, Missouri; Founder Missouri State Chapter of CHADD. Once residing in Laguna Woods, I was the nurse for a 'biker' club on the weekends. Volunteer work fills my heart with joy, another reason I am pleased to be a part of the R Star Foundation.

Shortly after Rosalind's fire I met her and absolutely wished to be a part of the good work to serve the world as a donor, and volunteer. Her work, particularly women is necessary. I am sure my ability to assist and help will continue with the R Star Foundation since I believe in the work in place.