

Ten years on...

In summer 2000, I visited Mustang for the first time. After five days of hiking, during which we enjoyed spectacular landscapes and divine silence, our group reached Lo-Manthang. While exploring the place, we met Lama Ngawang who showed us round the Great Compassion Boarding School he had founded only a short time before. He told us about his project -- how it was important for the children of Mustang to receive their schooling in their own Tibetan language and culture, and how sponsors for his pupils could help ensure this. His commitment and arguments were so compelling that two of us instantly took on a sponsorship; I decided to support six year old Lhakpa Choezom.

About ten years passed by, and during this time I read with great interest and satisfaction the reports of the development of the GCBS and how Lhakpa was progressing. Her letters gradually showed how her English skills were improving. Being able to communicate so easily with her now not only gives me great pleasure but affirms my belief that a good education is vital for a child's future success, and that a sponsorship should be a long-term matter that includes secondary schooling.

Over time, my desire to visit the GCBS and Lhakpa grew, especially after my friend Sina Stiffler gave me positive reports of her teaching courses at the GCBS in Pokhara and showed me her lovely photos. A further Impetus came in the form of my 18 year old granddaughter Laura, who was keen to visit Nepal.

We had already planned our visit to Pokhara when I was told that in October 2009 the whole GCBS intended to go up to Mustang on an "educational and cultural tour" and that the school in Pokhara would be closed during our visit. So we had to change our plans and instead of an easy school visit we went on a trekking tour to Lo-Manthang, and hoped to meet the school group and Lhakpa along the way.

This was quite a bold undertaking for a granny and her granddaughter, but our courage was to be rewarded. After two days of trekking, we arrived at the village of Chele, and much to our delight, we found ourselves unexpectedly in the midst of the GCBS group. At long last, I could embrace my godchild! These were very touching and unforgettable moments!

In Ghemi, we spent some time with Lhakpa and there we also attended the well-done show, which was a splendid event. Being able to enjoy the lovely dances and songs in the company of local people was yet another highlight of our trip!

The following morning, Lama Ngawang ordered two tractors from Lo-Manthang. These carried the 80 or so children, the staff, the two Swiss visitors, their guide and sherpa up to the pass. Laura and I enjoyed the bone-shaking journey, but our sherpa had to ride outside the loading area of our vehicle and was scared to death -- he was as white as a sheet when he got out!

In Lo-Manthang, Lama Ngawang kindly offered to put us up in his new guesthouse. We met up with the pupils again and had time to admire the marvellous renovated monasteries. We also had the great pleasure of visiting Lhakpa's mother. It was then time to say goodbye to the cheerful boys and girls.

Memories of these happy moments made our long journey back to Jomosom less arduous. My granddaughter Laura, not really being fond of walking, had been so thrilled by our adventure that she said she would do it again!