

Malcolm and Cati are sent by Church of Scotland and Methodist Church in Britain to work as mission partners with the United Mission to Nepal

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c/o United Mission to Nepal
PO Box 126
Kathmandu
Nepal

Dear Friends,

Cati writes: It is exactly one month since we arrived here in Kathmandu and every day has been so filled with the tasks of adjusting to all sorts of new beginnings that it feels as if we have been here considerably longer! We learnt very soon to expect the unexpected and to be prepared to wait for any plans to come to fruition. But ***the process of settling in*** is definitely under way!

Kathmandu is a sprawling vibrant city, alive with noise, colours, smells and a myriad of activities to feast one's eyes on. In amongst the busyness of modern life, heavy traffic dominated by fleets of motorbikes and innumerable stalls selling their eclectic range of produce, one discovers temples and shrines whose origins and religious significance remain as yet poorly understood by either of us! Running through the city is the Bagmati river, sadly a source of serious pollution rather than a source of life; yet every morning the needy can be seen wading their way across in search of anything worth recovering.

Crossing the road is a challenge! Several lanes of traffic have to be negotiated by simply stepping out alongside the more confident Nepalese pedestrians, trusting in their reassurance that motorists give way to pedestrians; slowly but surely making staggered progress to the other side!

At night intense darkness necessitates carrying a torch everywhere, as much to protect oneself as to detect cyclists whizzing by without lights. We have to walk long distances every day, picking our way between innumerable stray dogs and a lot of rubbish; yet outside individual shop-fronts and street stalls people are rigorous about sweeping their personal space. Without exception, the Nepalese have been extraordinarily courteous and friendly, greeting us with smiles and genuine appreciation of our faltering attempts to communicate in Nepali!

Malcolm writes: Our first month of ***Nepali language lessons*** has certainly been an uphill struggle! Nepali does not use our Latin or Roman script, but rather the Devanagari script which is also used in Sanskrit and Hindi. This means every sound is represented by a written character which is completely new to us. There are 36 consonants, 11 vowels, and 10 vowel symbols, making 57 written characters which we have to learn to recognise, pronounce, and write, before we can go any further.

UMN has three excellent long-standing native Nepali language teachers: Madhu, Indira, and Himal. With their guidance we have made some progress, but it feels painstakingly slow. We completed the 57 letters with a great feeling of triumph! Only *then* did the teachers reveal that there is also a complex system of half letters and joint letters which means the 57 characters can be combined in a variety of new ways. We struggled to get this information into our already saturated minds, and ended this task with a rich sense of achievement that we had 'finished' the script! But *then* the teachers moved on to the verb 'to be.' The verb is used differently depending on whether it means 'location,' 'identity,' or 'possession.' Then on top of this it declines differently for High, Middle, and Lower forms, depending on whether you are speaking about your 'seniors,' your contemporaries, or children. I made our language teachers laugh when I compared learning Nepali to the false summits that must be involved in climbing the Himalayas. Using this trekking analogy we now realise that not only have we not yet got within sight of base camp, but we have not even left Kathmandu!

Cati writes: The house we have come to call **our home** is along a relatively quiet street which, unusually for Kathmandu, has a name: Kumari Basti. We live above another couple who work for UMN and have inherited a lovely Nepalese woman called Amrita who comes here twice a week while we are out at language classes. She invariably manages to wash and dry our clothes in the time available, by virtue of a large bucket, sunshine and a washing line on the roof!

Until our trunks had finally arrived and we had managed to collect a miscellaneous assortment of furniture that was collecting dust in someone's garden shed, daily life felt reminiscent of camping holidays, except that we were also faced with the deadlines of intense language study! Gas for cooking is in very short supply and electricity even more so. Every day the entire city is divided into areas whose power-supply is cut off on strict rotation for about 16 hours in total. A 'load-shedding schedule' allows an approximate prediction of when we can expect to have power, but following recommendations we have invested in a lorry battery commonly referred to as an inverter system. It essentially drip-feeds off the electricity when available and then powers the basic minimum of sockets to keep one going until another period of mains power begins. Nothing liable to drain the battery can be risked, but a single lightbulb in each room, alongside sockets for the computer and bedside lamps, means this system is absolutely invaluable!

Cooking is inevitably more laborious than in UK, but we have got into a manageable routine of filtering all our water, and washing all fruit and vegetables in iodine. We minimise the use of gas by means of a pressure cooker and a 'miracle oven' that sits over a low flame and successfully produced a birthday cake for Malcolm on 4th March! A vegetarian diet is easy and cheap with locally available ingredients bought in open stalls and corner-shops; and we are rapidly discovering valuable sources of cherished treats such as yak cheese, nuts, yoghurt and brown rice...alternating with the staple Dahl Baat of lentils, rice and vegetables.

Each day brings new challenges but the rewards are more than sufficient compensation! We look forward to becoming steadily more familiar with what, barely a month ago, felt distinctly strange and unknown!

Malcolm writes: On our first three **Sundays** in Kathmandu we went to the International Church. Kathmandu is home to numerous expatriates: those working in Christian and

secular INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations); missionary societies; business and commerce; diplomacy. As a result the International Church is bursting at the seams with maybe some 200 adults and 50 children on an average Sunday. The pastor is a warm, friendly, and very welcoming American whom we like very much. However it feels like an artificial bubble of expatriate life: every word is in English, and only a tiny number of English-speaking Nepalis attend. So on our fourth weekend we went to a Nepali church. (In Nepal the principal day off is Saturday, so Nepali churches worship on Saturdays.) This is a highly unusual Nepali church in that the pastor, who is very well-educated, puts up English translations of the hymns, and English sermon notes, on the overhead projector. But every spoken word is in Nepali, and over 95% of the congregation is Nepali. As a result it seemed much more like an authentic Nepali church, and we felt very much at home. Yet the International Church is the place to meet the expatriates who will be the initial people to whom we hope to offer our pastoral services. So as the weeks go by we will need wisdom to know which of these two congregations we should attend regularly, - or whether another church yet to be discovered is in fact the right place for us.

We send you our love and prayers,

Malcolm & Cati

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