

Wed 05/08/2009 UPDATE ABOUT INDIA

Hello Everyone,
Tashi delek ngee drokpo dang drokmo,

I've been getting a lot of emails and calls from you (my friends and family) lately, so I thought I would send out a mass email to update you on Tenzin and myself.

In 23 days I will be in India again. Tenzin and I have been waiting for his refugee passport for a very long time now, but have been assured it should be in hand in about two months. After that point, we will be submitting our application to Canadian Immigration for Tenzin's permanent resident status (and his Visa to enter Canada). I have been preparing these papers for quite a while. Sean is our document keeper, and will be submitting our application from Canada once we Fed-Ex him the final documents. When the wheels are in motion, we could be waiting anywhere from one to nine months for the Visa which will allow Tenzin to fly home to Canada. We have been told three to six months is the average.

As most of you already know this has been a very difficult and sad time for us. Being apart for so long (I haven't seen Tenzin since Sep 2008) has worn us down emotionally, physically, and financially. When my student Visa ran out last year, we had planned to be apart no more than six months. But illness kept me from working the amount I needed to save for what we required. I am happy to report that we managed to give our family in the refugee settlement a slightly more comfortable situation, and thanks to the help we have received from our family, I will have just enough for plane tickets and immigration before I leave this month. Thank-you to those who supported us when we needed it the most.

I currently have a return ticket to Canada for June 2009. We are hopeful that immigration will be settled before that, but in these matters no one can say for sure. We are praying to be back before Christmas. Even though we have to live off of \$3/day in India, it is Tenzin and I's decision to not come back to Canada unless we are together. We will do everything possible to get home as soon as we can. As I'm sure you can imagine, the thought of us being forced to live apart again is too painful, no matter how difficult our situation is in India. Please be reassured that this time we have made arrangements for cleaner water, and have a larger store of medications which we hope will improve our quality of living substantially.

A few important notes about India:

~My cell phone number is the same as before: 011 91 988 210 5397 I can receive incoming calls anytime for free.

~Here in Canada we are 9.5 hours BEHIND India (daylight savings time = 10.5 hours) Please keep this in mind when you call....

~Please do not try to send us anything in the mail. I have had 5 packages stolen by the Indian postal service. It is useless. :-(If you are simply dying to send us some gifts then please use Western Union. It is truly the only way to get anything in India. ;-)

~We do not have access to home email, and the paid cyber cafes will have to be a budgeted luxury. Please send us emails on how you are!!! (But keep in mind I will have to read them fast) Unfortunately, bulk emails are the only way I can reply to everyone quickly enough. I apologize in advance for not being able to email you individually.

Thank-you again to everyone for your support and prayers. Ten and I are so excited to be together again. Here's hoping we will see you all at Christmas to welcome Tenzin into our family.

Kherang gee,
Dolma

Love,
Carr

Tue 01/09/2009 BLOG #1

Hello Everyone:

Well, as promised, here is my first blog from India. It has been an eventful trip so far.....

Lungtok got me to the airport where I was lucky enough to check in to get the last window seat on the plane. He waited with me until the last second, at which time I of course burst out crying. Six months with him have flown by, and I feel so lucky to have him as my brother. All the Indian women complimented me on my punjab suit during the trip, so I guess Lungtok picked a good one.

I got to Brussels with no problem, but the lay over was killer. Everyone just slept in the waiting area for the next plane. Ironically, the airport is known as the biggest chocolate factory in the world, but I waited hungry because all my euros were in India and I didn't want to get hosed by the exchange people. ☹ When we finally boarded, my area at the back of the plane was packed with about 20 armed police, and a guy shackled from head to toe, one seat over from me. A Belgian special service agent informed me that it was an Afghani man being deported. She assured me he was not dangerous, and would be traveling with 3 armed guards. She did caution that he might start screaming, and that I should not let it alarm me if it happened. Rightttttttt..... Luckily, he did not, and because there were free seats, everyone else was moved up. This meant a free seat next to me to stretch out. I was happy about this as 16 hours of flying. For some reason they were bad about serving water, etc. on the flight but I was so excited to see Ten that I didn't care.

Once I got to Delhi Airport, I went through the usual nonsense to get through customs, etc. I was now so excited about seeing Ten. Unfortunately, the entrance was packed, and he had not been admitted in. There was 2 exits and I didn't know where he was. My Indian cell wasn't (and still isn't) working, and every single pay phone was down. If I risked it and left, I was in danger of being stuck outside the airport, in a sea of conmen, with no phone, only 10rps of Indian money, and no way to contact Ten or get a cab. It was the middle of the night and I couldn't risk it. I waited around hoping I could spot him out the window, but no luck. Finally out of desperation, I convinced a chip seller to let me use his cellphone. (Thank goodness I know a little Hindi!) After 5 attempts we

finally got Ten, and I hurriedly told him where to meet me. I gave the guy my only India money, and then I saw my hero waiting outside the door.

After 2 minutes, he left me to get a cab, and we were finally on our way to the refugee settlement in Delhi. The crazy driving and the indescribable scene of Delhi didn't even faze me this time....although I barely took my eyes off of Tenzin. After 30 minutes we arrived, and whistled for the doorboy to wakeup and let us in. After a quick bucket shower I finally slept.

For those of you who have never been to Majnu Katilla (the Tibetan colony in Delhi) it is one of the saddest places you will ever see. It is truly a ghetto, filled with diseased dog, flies everywhere, filth in the streets, and so many children and adults begging...most of them leppers. We only went out once to buy tea for Aunt, then we ducked back in our room at the monastery guesthouse. We got a bus ticket for 6:30pm, where we would ride for 13 hours to get home.

We paid extra for the "AC" bus, but it was still hot as hell, with no shock absorbers, and of course people puking the whole time. The roads were so bad, that a few times, we got a least a foot of air. There was only 2 rest stops.....one after 3 hours to eat dinner at the Punjab roadside place, and one 9 hours after to go to the bathroom. We had to go right on the main street...Ten and I walked a bit away to try and have a bit of privacy. We were lucky that the bus was almost all Tibetan people so I was much more safe.

We arrived in lower Dharamsala just after daybreak, and got a cab as close to home as we could. We managed to get our stuff down the mountain and home. As it is monsoon, our place reeks like mold, which has been difficult for me. The pillows and blankets are the worse, but with little sunlight, there is not much we can do for at least another month. The closest place to get food is a good 20 minutes down the mountain, and it will take me awhile to get use to the altitude to be able to make the trip alone. I still feel like throwing up anytime I venture out too much. Ten took a few days off work to be with me, and he is helping me so much.

So much more to tell, but the keyboard is broken and the internet is crap so I am sending this off. Please forward this to anyone you noticed I missed.

With Love,
Carr

Kherang gee drokmo,
Dolma

Fri 04/09/2009 BLOG #2

Hello Everyone:

Ok, I have managed to find a computer with a working keyboard, so here goes blog #2. My apologies to those of you following me on Facebook that I posted edition #1 late....the internet at my last stop was slow beyond belief. I will do my best to post some pictures soon. Uploading pictures in India is one of those things I try to punish myself into doing only once a month.

Well, Ten and I have gotten settled in. The other day we trekked down the mountain, and managed to find some cleaning supplies (although god knows what chemicals are in there). We slowly cleaned our place from head to toe to de-mold it, and even got a bit of sunlight so I was able to get quite a bit of the washing done. I am happy to report that our place no longer smells like mold, and I can now breathe easy.

Hooray!

So in this edition, I thought I would let you know what our place looks like, and what my typical daily routine is. Besides Pema and Barb, no one has been to our place in India, so here is a rough description. Pics to follow soon I promise....

So we live near the MenTseeKhang...the Tibetan Medical and Astrological Institute in the middle of the mountain between lower Dharmasala, and McLeod Ganj (where HH Dalai Lama lives). It is mainly populated with Tibetan people, although our landlords are a very nice Indian family. We are in Northern India, in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. It is beautiful country, and once you get used to the altitude, and get your ass into shape enough to climb everywhere, it is a lovely place. We are about a 5 minute walk under the institute, where Ten works in the medicine department. In front of us is a VERY big drop off the mountain, behind us is more mountain, to our right is a Tibetan family just up the hill, and to our left is the infamous "basketball court in the middle of nowhere". That's right, we have a full fledged, paved basketball court on the side of the mountain. That is India for you. Our house is a typical one story concrete slab, with an upper flat level used to hang clothes, etc. We live around the side in one room, that has a table kind of built in where we have our propane tank, camp stove, and dishes. There is room for two single army-style cots, and not much else. We are lucky to have an actual water tap outside, that we share with all the others living in the area. As well we have a squat style toilet (aka a hole in the ground) and are very lucky to have a cement wash-room with another tap. It is all cold water, but it means we can wash the dishes, ourselves, clothes, etc. without me having to go a very long way to the river to fetch water. Beside us is the animals house, where the neighbours keep 2 goats and 2 cows. The bigger goat helps me clean the pots sometimes. ;-) We have HUGE red chillies growing outside our door, as well as some type of hard green fruit that I cannot identify. We also have a power switch, so we have light (when it is working) as well as a huge luxury of a TV and DVD player that we splurged on last year. It is really hard to describe the place without pictures so more to come on that later.

My typical day:

When the sun comes up around 6:30am, I wait my turn at the water tap to wash my face, and collect water to boil. I then get started re-heating last night's dinner for breakfast (usually water with potatoes and a bit of tomato and onion for example, or else maybe eggs and bread). I also rinse out the dishes from the night before, and get everything going. I then wake Tenzin so he can wash up before work. As everything is boiling I brush my teeth outside the door with a bit of sanitised water I keep from the night before. After we eat, I kiss Ten goodbye, and clean up after breakfast. If the weather is sunny, I also try to wash some clothes and get them drying on the line ASAP. Every few days I also take this time to take a quick bucket

shower. I then watch TV for about 30 minutes....we have such hit shows playing as I Dream of Genie, America's Funniest Home Videos, or maybe Full House translated into Hindi...LOL 30 mins is all I can take. I then slowly make my way up the mountain to McLeod Ganj, where I can get veggies for dinner, and go to HHDL's temple. When I am done, I quickly get back down to check on my washing (if it rains and gets wet, it is another days work wasted). I take my lunch at a small restaurant for about 90cents. With vegetables being the price they are now, Ten and I calculated that it is actually cheaper for us to both eat lunch out. I then get back home to relax for a bit, and prep dinner. Then it is my favourite time of day...BASKETBALL. Around 4:30 all the hot Tibetan boys come to play BB (my Ten included, who is of course the hottest of them all) for a couple of hours on this magical court. I am of course content to sit at the side lines and enjoy my time in heaven. ;-)

Once the game is done, Ten and I head back home, where I cook whatever I made for dinner. Then washing, and some relaxing time watching TV movies, and talking with Ten.

Okay, thats enough for now. I love you all. Man I am coveting my Starbucks Tea in the afternoons.....if anyone from the 'bucks wants to come over with some more....hahaha

With love,

Carr

Kherang gee drokmo,

Dolma

Thu 10/09/2009 BLOG #3

Hello Again Everyone:

Well, as you will see I have managed to get some photos uploaded for you. Please enjoy and comment on them because they took a longgggggggggg time to upload. ;-) It is difficult to accurately capture the scene here, but I hope this will give you some idea. More to come.

There are so many things to talk about, I never know where to start. Some of you know India very well, and some of you have never been, so I try to tailor my writing to give a bit of insight and humour for all. If there is anything you would like to hear about, just let me know. For now, I thought I would focus on the road and driving situations, as the past few days have brought meto thinking about both.

A couple of days ago, I needed to register myself as a long-term staying foreign national with the local police station. The last time I travelled down there by myself, I was constantly harassed by young Indian guys, so I knew I couldn't go without a helper. Tenzin had to work, as did my best friend in India, Jinpa, so in desperation I called Lungtok back home. He called his cousin for me, Kalsang Norbu, and within 20 minutes I not only has an escort, but a motorcycle to take me where I needed to go. ;-) Thus began the days adventure.....

The roads in our area are literally falling apart. They zig-zag at dizzying heights up and down the Himalayans mountains, are crumbling away, and really are only wide enough for 1 car. However, large trucks, cars, 3 wheeled cabs, and motorcycles constantly navigate our "roadways". This is enough to make even the most seasoned of travellers nervous, and everyday Tenzin begs me to take care when I

walk up the mountain, as cars will not swerve or slow down for pedestrians (and the alternative is a very, very long fall down the mountain). All this being said, it is STILL safer to hitch a ride with a motorcycle, with no helmet (and often with a guy you don't even know) than to try and walk. In this regard, I was one up, as not only was my helper Lungtok's cousin, he is also an art teacher at the TTS school, and a friend of Tenzin's.

I waited for Kalsang at the gates of the Men Tse Khang, daringly wearing pants, as my chupa dress would require me to ride side-saddle and there is no way I was game for that. He arrived with a big smile, and the familiar kind eyes of Lungtok, so I was put at ease and hopped on. It is very difficult to hold on to a motorcycle as a passenger in India, as you have to be free to compensate for the large bumps that unseat you, as well as to counter-lean during the constant turns so the bike doesn't tip over on the loose rocks and gravel. I held the back handle of the seat with my left hand (easier said than done as most of you know I am awaiting carpal tunnel surgery) and wrapped my right arm as tight around Kalsang as I could. Of course, we passed about a hundred of his friends as we drove, which made me very shy (and glad that I wasn't wearing my chupa and pangden that mark me as a married woman). Tenzin got a good laugh out of my embarrassment later. Despite the very scary roads, Kalsang was an excellent driver, and even slowed down his normal pace to put me at ease.

Now the way the roads work in India is you drive on the left hand side. However, what you actually do is drive in the middle, swerving around 2 other motorcycles (often with three or four people on it), 1 bus, and several cars, honking your horn if you want to pass, and swerving and hard braking at a moment's notice when a vehicle bigger than you decides to take the right of way. It is not for the faint of heart! Kalsang got me to the station safely though, and I felt much more confident riding this time (especially after the motorcycle accident I had last year). There are no traffic signs or signals really to speak of, however occasionally on really busy turns there is an Indian official to direct traffic. Unfortunately, he is always turned around talking to someone, or having tea, and from what I can see, not noticing the traffic situation in the least.

We waited for over 5 hours to get one signature so I could be registered at the police station (that's nothing new) and after lots of paperwork and nonsense, I have my residential permit. At lunch (that is, the 2 1/2 hour lunch the officials took after such a hard morning of "work") we went out to get masala tea and a parantha (large, flat bread made with potato) which was delicious. However, a pack of 7 Indian guys sat across from us, and behaved in the exact, rude, un-respectful way I am used to. Kalsang did his best to joke with me to put me at ease, but the disrespect I am constantly shown as a western woman always bothers me. Not long after lunch I had my papers and we were ready to head back up on the motorcycle.

I went up to McLeod with Kalsang to pick up a couple of new chupas I had made for me, and he stuck with me the rest of the day, even during the pouring rain, when he drove me back down the mountain, just to be nice. I thanked him several times, to which he replied that as I am Lungtok's sister, I am his as well, and that I should call him anytime I need. Tibetans are truly wonderful that way.

Ok guys I'm out of time. Look forward to hearing from you all. If you are following this on hotmail, the link to the pictures is as follows:
<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=309541&id=555625135&l=2e73f8ae8d>

With love,
Carr

Tashi delek,
Dolma

Mon 21/09/2009 BLOG #4

Tashi delek ngee drokpo drokmo tsangma,

Hi Everyone:

Ok, time for another blog. Sorry that this one is a bit late, but I was fortunate enough to have my time consumed by attending a Korean sponsored teaching at the Tsu Lhakhang by HH Dalai Lama on the Bodhicitta Commentary of Naranjuna. So here is some info on that teaching, and a few other notes:

It was a lovely three day teaching. Unfortunately the Men Tsee Khang didn't get vacation to attend, so Ten was stuck at work, and poor cousin Kalsang got stuck with me again (we have become best buddies, and he hangs out with me almost every day, despite the embarrassment of being constantly spotted with a white girl..LOL). You must register in advance to attend the teaching and get a photo pass to attend. This is done at the security office and usually takes an hour or more in line. I was lucky to run into my girlfriend Ani Choekyi, a nun from Australia, and we passed the time away quite happily. You also must bring a cup or bowl for tea, something to sit on (the concrete floor of the temple is not that comfortable for hours on end) a blanket or something to keep warm, and a radio so you can tune into the FM English translation. I spent much of the day prior explaining this to all the tourists, as there is no sign anywhere telling you what you need for a pass, or any info about the teaching for that matter. The only reason I had a head's up tip-off is because I ran into my monk friend Tsering on the street one day as we were both veering the big stud bull that rules the intersection at Temple Road. So anyways Kalsang and I got registered, and made plans to meet outside the Temple the next day.

The first day of any Teaching is always madness as the many "injies" (aka western folk), many who are not even Buddhist, crowd in to see what is going on. I waited at the gate with a Tibetan girl I know who makes donuts (you can bet I bought those every day to eat for breakfast...one donut costs about 3 cents and they are sooo good) to avoid being crushed by the taxis, 3-wheelers, motorbikes, and delivery trucks crammed full with monks and nuns. When I finally spotted Kalsang, we gave our cellphones (a forbidden item during the Teaching) to our friend, who tucked them into the breast of her chupa for us for safe keeping. We then had to split up as Tibetans and Westerners must use different entrances. Luckily, I managed to find a spot of floor big enough for both of us, and eventually the 6 foot tall Kalsang spotted my yellow hair through the crowd and we got seated on our burlap potato sacks and blankets.

Every morning we received butter tea, and in the afternoon sweet tea. Bread was also passed out, and the monastics usually receive a couple of dollars in money (depending how much the people who sponsored the Teaching donate). We were

seated beside an ancient Tibetan man spinning his Mani prayer wheel, and a young Tibetan baby named Tenzin who had shoes that squeaked when she walked. She took a shine to me, and was constantly bringing me her never ending stream of candies and goodies that the elderly Tibetans gave her. The cutest thing was when three monks bribed her to come over with candy, and tried to get the 1 1/2 year old to punch the other monks for potato chips. Classic! Oh yes, they were naughty monks. At one point, one of them fell asleep (in the seated lotus position), and the other two balanced a cup of tea on his head, then flicked his ear until he woke up and it fell. Everyone was rolling on the floor laughing at that one. For those of you who don't know, Tibetans are jokers with a capital J and love to laugh. In fact, one of my favourite parts of the Teaching was when Holiness laughed. I was even lucky enough for him to wack right by me on his way in 2 times, and the last time he looked right into my face. The first time I saw him again, I cried. The amazing energy the Dalai Lama brings into any room cannot be described.

Everyday when the Teaching was done, I would hop onto Kalsang's motorcycle, and down the mountain we would fly. On a related topic, one day I was naughty and didn't wear my leggings under my chupa because it was so darn hot. It ended up hailing and pouring rain, and during the brief slowing of weather, Kalsang raced to get his bike so he could lift me home. Thus came my deliema. While it is okay to ride a bike with the leggings on, it is definitely not appropriate without, as half of my bare legs would be showing. So I had no choice but to ride side saddle. Yup, hail everywhere, me in my full chupa, balanced side saddle on the back of Kalsang's Pulsar praying to God we wouldn't crash as we navigated the twists and turns of the mountain. He got me home safe and sound, and I can now say that I trust him fully. Needless to say, I always wear my leggings when I go up to McLeod now. ;-)

In other news an elderly relative has come from Tibet, but because of safety concerns, I am afraid I cannot elaborate more. Ten is now on a 2-week trip with this person to do a pilgrimage of the monasteries before our relative has to get home to Tibet (a special visa was granted). I am bummed that I am not with them, but I do not have the necessary protected area pass, and I do not want to make them stick out due to the situation. I miss Ten so much, but he will be back soon,. and all the boys at the Men Tsee Khang are keeping an eye on me to make sure I am okay.

As per last year, I thought I would end my emails with some 'Indian-isms' to give you a laugh. Love to you all....I miss you.

Indianisms:

~Yesterday, a goat ate my soap...well, half of it, I chased the rascal off before he finished.

~We didn't have any water for 3 days, and we had to travel more than 10mins to the nearest place to fetch some in a bucket.

~I share my washing space with two very large spiders (one almost the size of my hand) who I must take care not to splash with water when I have my bucket showers.

Love to all,
Carr

Kha-leh shey ngee Bhodpas,
Dolma

Tue 29/09/2009 BLOG #5

Mee tsangma Tashi Delek,
Hello Everyone,

Time for another blog. Things have been moving pretty slowly in my world with Tenzin still in South India. He is hoping to be back within the week, as one of our cousins has offered to take over his tour guide duties. ;-) For those of you who have not heard yet, Tenzin's yellow book (aka his passport, aka the thing we have been waiting almost 2 years for) has finally come into Delhi!!! He is going to pick it up, and after he gets his medical and police checks done, we will FedEx the last documents off to Sean in Canada, and our immigration will be underway. Prayers for a Christmas in Canada!!!

I have been keeping myself busy with washing the clothes, watching Kalsang paint thangkas, and watching basketball. I am also going in to get my motorcycle license next week. That's right kids, I have decided to swallow my fear of the roads and do something that I really want to. My girlfriend Catherine helped me get all the papers, and on Monday I will be going down to the government offices with her boyfriend so we can get all the paperwork done together. This will give me my learners permit, and within a month I can test for my full license (all of which is apparently very easy, and basically a joke). I am going to start my training in a cricket field, so I can be comfortable with driving again. All this being said, one does not actually need a license to drive in India, but this is just something I enjoy and wanted to do. Soon enough Ten and I will have children, so I figure this is our time relax and go for the things we enjoy. Please don't worry, I'll be careful, and I can assure you, I will almost never be driving faster than 30/hr.

Nothing else too interesting going on...life here just inches by. I can't wait for Tenzin to get home. I will leave you with some Indian-isms:

Top 10 Things You CANNOT be in India

10. Afraid of spiders
9. Afraid of snakes
8. Afraid to push to get what you need
7. A city-slicker who is uncomfortable living with chickens and goats.
6. Addicted to electricity, washing machines, or running water.
5. Afraid of dogs
4. Afraid to ride on the outside of a bus
3. Be averse to dirty cups/plates/utensils and questionable food
2. Bothered by constant loud Hindi music, and no personal space
1. In a hurry.

Love you all,
Carr

Ga gee duk,
Dolma

Mon 05/10/2009 BLOG #6

Tashi delek mee tsangma,

Hi Everybody!,

These days the internet is quite difficult, I think, in part, to the amount of precipitation in the air. It also causes my cellphone to do weird things sometimes. So my apologies for those who have been trying to reach me. FYI my number is: 011919882154098 Please feel free to ring me I'd love to hear from you guys. Just remember, I am 9.5 hours AHEAD of you. ;-)

So lots and lots to say as usual where to begin? There are several things I wanted to talk about...

I have not had any water at my place for 6 days, so I hauled my butt up the mountain to McLeod Ganj, and have been camping out at Kalsang's place. His cousin is away, so it works out perfectly...at night he crashes at his place, and leaves me the luxury of a room to myself (sigh, personal space!!!). Staying in the Amdo village is cool, and now that most people realize I am the cousin (and not the girlfriend) I am pretty comfortable there. It is such an interesting scene I thought I would try to paint you a picture...

Every morning I wake up to the crying of someones' kid, and the Indian women screaming at their cows to move their asses up the hill. As I slowly come to, my head is surrounded by the small sparrows that come in through the windows. (When Kalsang is home, he is in constant war with the birds, whom he calls "Pangos" aka beggars....funny to watch 6 ft whatever Kalsang versus the 2 ounce birds.) I then grab some leggings and a long top, grab my toothbrush and soap, and head out the front door to wash. As soon as I pull back the curtain that all Tibetans have in front of their door, I pass the 10 or so chickens that hang out on our level. The 2 dogs usually come to greet me and playfully jump up to say good morning, then I head down the 1.3ft wide stairs. There is a tap outside where I can brush my teeth and splash water on my face. But the bathroom is another story. In the "Amdo Village" as we all call it, we share 2 outhouses with about 40 people. So I, like all women in India, must learn to "hold it" as men take priority. (It wouldn't be proper for me to go when they are down there, although I am sure they would let me) I often wait 30-40 mins but it is no big deal as I am used to it by now. I take this time to fetch water, and get some boiling (an essential job of any good nama [wife]...hahahaha). The women are all busy sweeping down the floors with the 3 foot long straw brooms we have, and getting the washing started. The children also need to be sorted out with food and hair brushing, etc. (the kids all call me ah-ja now...sister, and always come to sit on my lap or get their hair brushed out). One thing I love about Tibetans is that a community raises a child. Kids freely pass wherever they want, and everyone keeps an eye on them. If they are bad anyone older than them may scold them (and even give them a playful swat on the butt if needed). The older generation truly take joy in spending time with the little ones. It makes me wonder what the hell ever happened to our Western society...how did our family unit fall so far?

I also had the opportunity to attend a party in the quarter. Tibetans in India have a funny habit of having an all out house party to celebrate what they call a "Baby's

Birthday". In this case, 2 year old Orgyen, the baby beneath us, was the cause for celebration. No pin the tail on the donkey or cake here...even 2 year old Tibetans party hard core.

The rooms are in various levels, like steps, however there is a kind of main 2nd level flat common area which was the home of the party. There was at least 40 people when we got there, included 15 monks or so, and everyone was chowing down on Tingmo (tibetan steamed bread) momos (dumplings), rice, etc. Orgyen's mother was busy making sure everyone had a full glass of tea or juice, and making constant runs to the tap to keep the dishes clean and ready for 2nd and 3rd helpings. Every table and chair and plate that we all owned was in use, and the India people who owned the building (and the few families who lived there with us) all joined in the festivities. After dinner, the music was cranked up, and the roof was a sea of dogs running, kids laughing like crazy with their balloons (a real treat in India), men smoking, and women dancing. The younger, Indian-born Tibetan girls were not shy to dance, and unfortunately dragged me up several times. We were dancing club style to hip-hop and Hindi beats. The men sat and smoked, and were sipping what looked like a lassi (a yogurt style drink popular in India). I noticed there were laughing more and more, so I inquired as to what was in this "Tibetan Lassi". Turns out it was moonshine, and a few glasses later, even the older men joined in on the dance. It is not acceptable for Tibetan women to smoke or drink (although at one point of the night, a girl leaned in and asked me if I had any "secret"...aka smokes on me...LOL). Once everyone was up, we turned the music to traditional Tibetan songs, and we started doing the circle dances (which look very much like the Native Canadian dances at the pow wows). I know most of the steps, and we were all having a blast. Even the older, chupa wearing Tibetan grandmothers joined in. The mountains, the moon, the laughter....happiness like this is unfortunately rare in the lives of refugees and I was so glad I could share in it. After that we ended the evening with more modern music, and the grandmothers were dancing hip-hop right along side of us. We stayed in the circle, and different people went in the middle to strut their stuff. It is an evening I will never forget...I wish I could paint a better picture for you.

On a similar strain, I want you all to know that although Tibetans keep a very brave and cheerful face on most of the time, they are truly suffering within. I have been very fortunate to share my life with Tibetans for many years, and have become family with a few of them. It is only after many years of close contact that I think I was really able to appreciate the heart-brokenness, the un-yielding sadness in their lives. Many have very deep hurts, that they try to hide even from their family. The loss of country, murder of relatives, destruction of their home and resources, the feeling of having no home....it is really too much for them to bare. Their religion is all that keeps them together. Many times I have now witnessed my close family and friends suddenly breaking down in uncontrollable fits of sobbing, suddenly triggered by a memory from home and being overwhelmed. They keep it all inside until suddenly the dam breaks. It is so heartbreaking to witness. I won't go into more details here, but please know how much your support means to the Tibetan people. With HH the Dalai Lama getting older, Tibetans really need to know you are behind them.

On a happier note, I was at the ongoing basketball tournament yesterday. We have one guy on the TTC team who must be 7ft...he likes like Yao!!! Some of these guys (and girls....they actually had a couple of girls teams show up from the schools) are really good. I am currently supporting the "Seeds", a team upon which many of my

friends play. The crowd cries out "tsa-wo" [hot] when a great shot is made, and there is several other jokes and cheers that keep the fans and players constantly entertained. I was so happy to see that almost all of the male players came out to support the girls matches. My favourite player is of course my friend Kalsang...not my cousin, but the sports teacher from TCV (and friend to the Wangdas). I have known him longer than Tenzin, and he is truly a great guy. The other day, he heard that I was bored out of my mind without Tenzin, and road down on his motorcycle to pick me up. We drove up to Dharamcot (the roads were crazy and despite falling road, mud, fish-tailing, etc. he was in total control of the bike at all times), a little too fast for my liking, and he treated me to this out of the way place that actually serves half decent pizza. It was nice to have a bit of a get away, and talk with an old friend. I love the fact that there is always time for friends and hanging out in India. Another thing we seem to have lost in the West.

Ok, this is no doubt long enough now. Ten will be back tomorrow morning around 5:30am (yeah!!!) but then he will no doubt have to leave again for Delhi for the damn passport. I'll keep you posted.

With love,
Carr

Rang gee go-ser drokmo,
Dolma

Fri 16/10/2009 BLOG #7

Hello Again,

Tashi Delek,

Well, lots has happened since my last blog. Tenzin now has his passport which is huge as we have waited almost 2 years for it. In addition, the medical check is now finished, and the last piece...the police report...is due to us next week. As soon as we have it in our hand we will be sending the last papers off to Sean, and hopefully a Canadian visa and permanent resident status will not be far behind. Thank-you to all of you who have been praying for us. We are really hoping to be back in Canada soon.

I have lots of stories to tell, but this time I will relate to you our trip to Delhi and Chandigarh to get Ten's passport and medical check. It was, to say the least, eventful.....

So it started off with us trying to organize care at home (as a very special elderly relative who I will not name for security fears) was staying with us from Tibet. It is amazing how difficult it can be to ensure one has access to food, water, etc. in India. We also are the sole care-takers of 3 small kittens who live outside (and unfortunately sometimes inside) our home so we had to make sure they would get milk and bread. In addition, we had to beg Ten's work for more time off (as he had just taken time off to take his relative all over South India). However, after a very busy and rushed day preparing, we got up to McLeod Ganj, and booked what we thought was a nice AC bus to Delhi.

Turns out our bus, while it did have extremely cold AC and very loud Indian music, did not have windows (the kind that open). Within the first 25 minutes, the bus had to stop 4 times because so many people needed out to puke. The only door that opened was behind a locked door from the driver's side....yeahhhh.....not good. As usual there were only 2 stops in the entire 13 hours to go to the bathroom (on the road side) and unfortunately the seats were too uncomfortable to sleep in. We got there is one piece though, and as usual got off at the Tibetan Refugee Colony.

We went to the restaurant run by the Drepung Monastery to get some breakfast. We helped ourselves to the sink in the alleyway (literally, manned by 2 dogs with mange) to brush our teeth and wash our face. After we had rested for 20 minutes, we hailed a cab (always a bargaining delight) and went straight to the Tibetan Embassy. We had to wait around for someone in the office to actually show up, but that morning we got the passport. It was like a dream..... :-) :-) Three Cheers!!!

Next we needed to go about 6 hours back towards home to Chandigarh, to get Ten's medical check done by one of the Canadian approved doctors. We decided on Chandigarh, because it has a very new and modern hospital, and it not filthy like Delhi. It would also allow us to rest before headed straight back. In the middle of the day, the only buses running were the bottom of the line government "chicken-buses", so with no choice (and trying to fight off the many touts trying to rip us off for a more expensive fare) we had our tickets and were off. (Might I add, the bus station absolutely reeked of piss.) The bus was.....bumpy....but we had a front seat and were doing ok. We were about half way there, when the bus wildly swerved off to the side of the road (narrowly avoiding a jeep). The tire was completely destroyed, and we were stranded in the middle of nowhere. It would take hours and hours for the wheel to be fixed, so our only option was to try and hail another government bus the rest of the way there. There was a mad rush to the conductor to sign the back of our tickets to ensure we could get on another bus. Then, we waited...and waited. It was probably about 100 degrees, and of course we had just finished off our water 10 minutes before. Many buses passes, but none stopped, Indian buses are usually packed notoriously full, so even if they had of wanted to (which they didn't), no buses were able to help us. Finally 1 slowed, and 5 men jumped wildly onto the back later and tried to climb to the roof and in the windows. Ten and I realised we would have to do the same or we would be in danger of heatstroke (neither of us being able to stand the heat the way the Indians can). So about 20 more minutes later we saw our chance. Ten was staked out down the hill so he could see if a bus was coming with his eagle sharp eyes. He gave me the signal and we pushed through to the road side, as close as we could come to the other cars without being hit. When the bus slowed, we ran like hell. Indian buses will not stop, but only slow to a running pace. Ten leaped first and got in the bus, I leaped right after him, and hooked my arm through the outside rail. Unfortunately, I could not get in the bus though. For about a 1/4 of a mile, I was terrified, as the bus picked up speed, and we swerved around every manner of vehicle. Ten fought hard to make room for me, then grabbed me inside. The bus was of course packed, so no chance of a seat. Luckily Ten's Khampa body paid off, and with his height he grabbed hold of a bar on the roof, and told me to hang onto him as tightly as I could. No time for PDA protocol and we ignored the stares. We knew we had at least 2 more hours of ride to go, and I was honestly worried I might faint. Luckily about 2 minutes later, a bunch of people got off, and we got to sit up front next to the driver...the best place, beside a big window with "fresh" air.

About an hour later we stopped for a rest. As usual I was constantly hassled by Indian guys, with rude stares, comments, and some even grabbing my arm whenever Tenzin's head was turned. We managed to break free so we could piss in a field, bought a pre-made veggie burger (pre-made with what I didn't want to know) and got the biggest bottle of water we could. Then we went straight to Chandigarh without incident.

Chandigarh is a nice city, with proper roads, and even some gardens. When we got to the bus station, we got a 3-wheeler to take us to the hospital. We wanted to know where we were going, and try to find a guest house within walking distance for our appointment there the next morning. The closest guest house was only able to offer us a cot in the basement alongside about 30 strangers, so we decided to opt out. Unfortunately we had to 3-wheel all over the city and fight tooth and nail to finally get a Guest House at a decent price. I managed to trick the guy into thinking Tenzin was Indian, and got the best price. ;-)

We had a nice rest (we had a proper bed, water to wash with, and even a TV!) and food, and were ready to go the next morning. I managed to keep the Indian desk clerk from cheating us (again...I literally grabbed 10 rupees from his hand) and we got another 3-wheeler to the hospital. Everything went smoothly, after a few hours we were ready to go home. The medical check was extremely expensive, and we were left with only a couple hundred rupees to our name. This meant we had to take the good old chicken bus home again. The alleged 6 hour drive turned into 10 hours, and we were never so happy to see Dharmasala. We had dinner at a late nite Dhaba (Indian restaurant) and made the slow walk up the mountain home. We were greeted to cat shit on our bed (as Ten's relatives did not fully understand that all the windows needed to be closed or the kittens would come in) and after we dealt with that, we collapsed into sleep.

I thought I would share with you a few interested things we saw on our road trip...

Signs:

- "Men at work go slow". (To prove that point, there were about 7 men sleeping, 1 smoking, and 2 Indian women with probably 100 pounds of un-teethered wood balanced on their heads at the construction site)
- "I love you Dear, but not your speed."
- "World famous table cloths"
- "Ladie's Hockey Nursury" (Even I can't guess at this one)

Things we saw on a single bicycle:

- 7 school kids balanced on various sewage pipes protruded from a bicycle (lashed on with straw) powered by one man.
- About 300 balloons (we assumed there was a driver under there somewhere but we could not see him...how did he see to drive?!?!?!)
- a man, a woman riding side saddle on the back fender, and a goat.
- a man balanced a full sized refrigerator
- a man balancing a full sized wooden bed, complete with mattress and sheets

Interesting Vehicles which we passed on the highway:

- an ex-army truck with no sides, roof, windows, or anything, except bare machinery,

a steering wheel, and a seat.

-a wooden slate balanced on 2 wheels powered by a horse, carrying 3 women, 1 man, and a lot of building pipes

There is so, so much more but for another time. What else is new? HH Dalai Lama is giving another teaching, which is great. Here's a "not so" funny story: Kalsang and I drove 3 hours to replace the bald tires on the motorcycle the other day, and had a scary incident. I told him the day before I felt like something was wrong and he told me it was the tires. I begged him to replace them so the next day we set off together to Kangra (a helper is required for such long trips and I was worried in case he had to stop driving to be by himself). We were going down the mountain, and we both felt nervous. The roads are not great, and the tires were in no shape. At the same time we suggested that I get off and walk down the mountain until we got to the good roads "just in case". After I got back on we realised 30 seconds later that the brakes had just given out. With the power of both of our feet we were able to stop as we had just started rolling again. If we had not been together, Kalsang would not have been able to stop, and could have been seriously hurt or even killed. Also, if I had not gotten off before the hill, the momentum would have been too great, and our combined weight would have starined the brakes to give out just before. The moral of the story...always trust your instincts. Lungtok tols us to take care of each other and we did. Needless to say, Ten freaked out when he heard. Haha anyways no worries all is fine.

Ok, best to you all. Email or call when you have time. I will try to send pics next week.

Love,
Carr

Rang gee drokmo,
Dolma

Mon 19/10/2009 BLOG #8

Tashi delek,

There are so many random bits of information that I keep forgetting to tell you all, I thought I would try and record them. I will endeavor to start carrying a notepad in my purse so I stop forgetting the details. For now, here is a smattering of bits and pieces....

Waking Up:

In the morning the predominant sound is that of crying children, bleating goats, and of course, hacking. Yes hacking....the sound of Indian (and Tibetan) guys hacking up the phlegm from their throats over and over again. They also pinch the bridge of their noses with two fingers and blow out the mucus on the ground. Watch your step.....

Getting Things Done:

In India, anything that is important (getting a marriage certificate, license, registering anything, even going to the bank or post office) usually requires three things: Baksheesh (money to pay off the clerk); photos; and the patience of a saint. The India bureaucratic process is so indescribably ridiculous, that I have seen many first timers reduced to tears. The forms you need are difficult to obtain, and you always need multiple copies. Every paper needs a recent passport sized photo stamped to it (what they do with those photos I shudder to think), and nothing gets done in under 3 hours time at least. Knowing which office to go to and what papers you need are only the start. They will only accept certain things on certain days (this information is posted nowhere), and the line to get a clerk is pure chaos. Usually one must wait through the daily 2 hour lunch break, then push like mad through the mob to get your signed paper (often after slipping money into the clerks pocket so that the "problem" with your paper magically disappears.) The only way to deal with it is to just go with the flow, and bring a friend along so you can chat, and get lunch together. There is no hurry for anything here.

Animals:

India is full of interesting creatures...beautiful long tailed parrots, tiny little lizards racing across the rocks, and other things not so great. In the former category I will talk about cows, dogs, and monkeys. Cows in India are considered sacred to the Hindus (and likewise pigs to the Muslims) so neither meat is permitted to be sold. (Although there is an underground meat trade but if one is caught serious fines and jail time will follow). Cows are permitted to wander free everywhere to graze, resulting in shit everywhere and serious traffic problems. The cows know that they have the right of way, and will literally walk right over you if you don't move and have no fear of cars or motorcycles. The dogs are all wild, and are "owned" by the community. Most are quite friendly, however many have mange or worse so care must be taken to look carefully for illness. Dogs roam in packs and have clearly defined boundaries. If another dog goes into their space, a vicious dog fight ensues. Bystanders must be very careful to clear the way as many people have accidentally been bitten this way. Despite the disease and often, lack of food, the dogs seem so much happier here in India than at home where they need to stay indoors or on leashes. Monkeys here are like squirrels for us at home. They are everywhere and will literally brush past you as they go. They are beautiful grey ones like the Rinpoche Monkey in the Lion King movie, and not so nice brown ones with really red asses.

Moneys do not need to be feared generally, but one must take care not to get too close to a baby with Mama around. Also, as they are always in packs, in large colonies it is best to walk with a friend, or they may try to steal your bag or whatever. For me the fear is getting scratched accidentally. I have already mentioned the huge spiders and really big snakes (the later which I thankfully have not encountered yet this trip).

Meeting People:

Anytime you see someone you know, it is customary to stop and chat. (Once again there is no such thing as rushing to get somewhere) This is the case whether you are walking, on the back of a motorcycle, or whatever. Tibetans always greet each other the same way on the road, "Gawa?" or "Gawa drokee yoe?" or a similar variation, meaning, "Where are you going?" Your answer can be a simple "up" or "down", or a more complex, "Going to buy vegetables". You then counter with

"Cho?" meaning "You?" and the other person will respond. What follows is several "Yah yah's" by each party, perhaps a small nod, then a continuation of your journey. If the friend is a close one, you will stop and talk for a few minutes. During this entire time, it is customary to hold hands with the person, never letting go until you part ways. If someone is your senior, it is generally polite to greet them with Gen la (teacher) Kushu la (if it is a monk) or jho jho/ahja (brother/sister). Little ones are simply greeted with "boy" or "girl" (bhu/bhumo la). If you meet a friend who is sitting down (generally meaning they are at a tea shop) you would ask "Gare jig ee yoe?" or a similar variation meaning "What are you doing?" Then you would usually be asked to join in for a cup of tea (which unless you are really in a rush, you should not refuse). Tibetan habit is that 1 person pays everyone's tab. At the end of any tea drink or meal, there is always a fight over who is going to pay. This is not because people do not want to pay, but rather because everyone insists on paying. I have literally seen Tibetans get into scraps over this (and I have to admit I have gotten into a few shoving matches myself). I have to fight especially hard, because I am a girl, so the men always want to pay for me. I literally had to push Kalsang out the door of the restaurant with Ten's help the other day to win the right of paying. In general, Tibetans are extremely easy with money as it doesn't mean that much to them. Friends freely lend money back and forth, and elders in the family are constantly giving us in the younger generation money just because they want to see us happy. Of course, with the situation as it is now, it is important for Ten and I's generation to make sure the older ones have money for food, etc.

Interesting People:

McLeod Ganj is filled with interested people. In general, besides the native Indians, the streets are filled with Tibetans of all ages, monks and nuns from several countries, foreigners (Canada, US, Israel, Eastern Europe, etc.), Dharma hippies and various weirdos, and beggars (the lepers and the women with undersized newborns begging for milk). I thought I would make note of a few easily spotted local characters to give you an idea of the flavour.

-Gay Jesus: This is an Indian guy wrapped only in a white loin cloth (unfortunately rather see-through) which then drapes over his back (he is partial to flinging it over his shoulder drag-queen style), who looks remarkably like Jesus Christ. His hair is sometimes down, and sometimes wrapped snake-coil style on his head. He is usually seen wearing a floppy women's pink sunhat, with a sparkly pink clutch purse to match.

-The Snake Guy: Every once in awhile the snake guy comes. He is a native Indian with a huge cobra wrapped around his body. He comes up to you unawares to shock/delight you, then tries to get a few rupees by winding the snake around your body and letting someone take a picture. I have no idea if his snake has been de-venomed or not.

-The Head Leper: There are many beggars in India, some which have been crippled by leprocy, etc. and some who have even more sadly been purposely maimed as a child to envoke more sympathy and bring in more alms for their "owner". The beggars in McLeod are mostly leppers, and many are missing limbs, are dragging themselves on the ground with carts, etc. The head leper has one leg and a large bandage around his head. He is the boss and has meetings with the others (including the young women with the starved undersize newborns) to say where each is to go, etc. and I'm sure to divide up the takings. He is missing several teeth but appears to have some gold ones in his mouth (although they may just be very discoloured).

Buying Stuff:

This is one of my least favourite tasks in India. In order not to be cheated, one has to know how much something costs, which is impossible unless you do your homework. I always eavesdrop to hear what things go for to Hindi buyers, or better yet, take Ten or Kalsang with me to fight it out. It is so tiring being constantly discriminated against. I hate fighting for stuff, but here it is the only way. Also, when buying vegetables on the street, you really have to rifle through to make sure you are not getting old and spoiled stuff, and watch the weights the seller is using on the scale carefully. Just to get a few things, I have to go to several fruit/veg stands to find the basics. Fruit is very expensive so it is a treat. Tofu/paneer is not easy to find these days, and I have noticed my body getting lower due to lack of protein. To compensate we are trying to find yogurt or milk when we can, then share it with the kittens. The other thing is knowing where to go. Shops are down alleys left and right, and with no signs or street names, one doesn't know where to go unless you know it previously. For example, when Ten and I bought our new army cot, we went down an alley behind a stationary store to "Vishnu's House of Light's". What did he sell? 80% of his stock was army cots, 20% 1970's style blenders, but to my knowledge, no lights. Yeah.....

Ok, I hope that fills in some blanks. As always, please comment, write back, or drop me a line.

Love,
Carr

Bhod gyal lo,
Dolma

Sat 07/11/2009 BLOG #9

Tashi Delek mee tsangma,

Hi Everyone:

I apologise for the long delay from my last blog. Unfortunately I was extremely sick for about 2 weeks. I got a very bad stomach virus (gaurdia) from bad food (no surprise how that happened) and I had a really difficult time getting the proper medication. Anyways, no worries I'm 90% now, just weak and tired. This is the first time I've been outside the house in a long time so its pretty exciting. As penance I have spent the last several hours uploading photos for you on Facebook. For those of you following me on email, the link is below; for everyone else the album is called "Ten's Trip" as it is mainly pictures he took while on pilgrimage in South India. I will try to add more descriptions later when Ten has a chance to sit down at a computer with me to sort through what is what.

So as a result of my illness, Ten had to run around like crazy as I was unable to leave the house to buy vegetables, wash anything, etc. Poor guy he never complained and took such good care of me. He works over 10 hours a day but always has a smile on his face. I forgot to mention before that I also have 2nd degree burns up my right arm. My good old carpal tunnel decided to strike while I

was cooking, and my hand lost all power, causing me to drop a pan with very hot oil in it. No worries though it is almost healed now although I suspect I will have scars for awhile.

Dilwale, the huge Indian festival of lights, came and went. It consisted of LOTS of fireworks, which we could see from above when we looked down on the valley from our roof. Ten was amazed at "all that money wasted up in the air." He has a point....people are starving but there is money for fireworks. Hmmm. Our Indian neighbours were very nice, and brought us out some food. They gave us homemade rice pudding, and a bowl filled with puffed rice and Indian sweets. (Enough sugar to enable one to see through time). One thing almost tasted like maple sugar candy! Also one of the women painted a really cool design on the ground, sort of like a mandala although we couldn't figure out the meaning. Our house was also decorated with a string of Christmas lights (which blew the breaker at first for our entire area although they managed to jerry-rig it somehow). It was so funny seeing them strung above the goat house....kind of like Christ in the manger?

We were blessed to attend yet another teaching by HHDL. As usual Kalsang was my partner in crime, and we also shared our spot with our friend Rebecca from America. Holiness decided to try speaking in English which was really nice. I had the Tibetan translation in my ear, although not everything got translated. At the end of the day when the Dalai Lama was telling us what would happen the next day, I got to translate for the surrounding Tibetans which was fun.

Anyday, we pray that the last papers will arrive to Sean for our immigration. Things are lost so easily in the mail and of course I had to send originals. :- (Please pray for us that our papers will be swift and without problem. I will not even tell you what we had to go through to get Ten's police report, but needless to say it was super fun.

Apparently the road I use to go up to McLeod and get our vegetables, etc. is closed for repair. The detour would take over 3 hours to walk. I have an idea on how to short cut through, but I am still too weak to test the theory. For now this makes getting veggies a real problem. Also with a girl recently raped in broad daylight in the area, Ten doesn't want me walking alone for obvious reasons.

Ten and I are playing chess again; he never goes down without a fight. Our barn kitties are getting bigger. One was lost and a neighbour told us it died so we are down to 2. One of them is completely domesticated, and always jumps on our laps and drives us crazy with it's kitten antics. Hmmm, what else? I will keep this short to leave you time to check out the MANY pictures I uploaded. As always, leave comments and let me know what you think. I miss you all and I miss home so much. Keep us in your prayers.

Love,
Carr

Kherang gee injie gyakpa,
Dolma

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=337534&id=555625135&l=15879395ee>

Fri 13/11/2009 BLOG #10

Tashi delek,

Hi All,

Please check out the last of the pictures I uploaded to Facebook, which have the last of Ten's trip to South India, as well as some shots from home. Please enjoy and comment!

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=340259&id=555625135&l=405366b4d5>

Sean called and Ten and I's immigration papers made it safely to Canada. We will be doing one last check this weekend, then off they go! I have heard that sometimes cases are processed as quickly as 1.5 months so there is still a (dim) hope we could be back for Christmas. Let's pray....

The weather has turned very cold here, so Ten and I went down to Lower Dharamsala to the Monday standing market to get some cheap clothes. It is a very interesting experience, kind of like a huge flea market. On Monday all of the usual shops are closed, so people swarm in from everywhere, holding up the stuff they have to sell, or spreading it on the ground with a sheet. I was really in need of some shoes (all I had was sandals) so we found some for 300rps (\$7.14). Mind you these are not new shoes but are put together with bits and pieces. For example, the outside says Reebok, the inside Fila, and there is no way they are genuine parts of either. They were all I could find with the toes wide enough for me, and so far, they are holding together nicely. I also got a hoodie from Harvard University, as well as some track pants, for about \$3.50 each. Socks took about 15 minutes of bargaining from Tenzin, then after buying some thread to mend our old clothes for 1 rps each, we were on our way, 3 hours later. It is quite exhausting fighting through the crowds, haggling for everything, and making sure no one steals your bag or money right off your back. The other important thing we bought that day was some probiotics to try and get my stomach back to normal working order. They seem to be helping, and I have been advised to keep it up for a month.

The excitement here these days is that the road is being "fixed". They are finally done the stretch between here and McLeod Ganj which is good news for me. Kalsang drove me home on the motorcycle yesterday, and I have never had such a smooth, worry free ride. It's amazing how much more fun it is when you don't have to worry about falling off the side of the mountain. We noticed 2 spots where the work from last week is already crumbling away, so we figure the repairs will last about 2 months. Haha, Indian workmanship at its best. Anyways, at least I can buy vegetables again. :-)

Not much else new to report. Life goes on here pretty much the same way everyday. Now that it is getting colder life is much less comfortable for us, but we just keep praying our Visa will come soon and we can get home.

Rang gee drokmo,
Dolma

Love,
Carr