

Nov. 20, 2009 BLOG #11

Hello & Tashi Delek:

Thank-you to everyone who has been concerned with my health. I am now free of my previous illness, and off all medications, save vitamins. Ten and I are being very careful about what food we eat, and I'm making a concentrated effort to get more protein and fruit in. We are hopeful that we could be on our way home to Canada early in the new year, so we are feeling a bit more confident about using our money to try and get better food.

It has turned very cold here, which makes going to the outhouse, or washing the dishes with the freezing cold tap water super fun. I am going to ask Ten to buy a small electric heater for me, because I don't think I can take much more of the chill in the daytime sitting by myself at home (Ten's body heat is missed!). I have two sleeping bags around me now and the real cold snap hasn't even hit. What I wouldn't give for indoor heat. It will be so appreciated when we get home.

Not too much interesting here. The snow mountains are clear on the horizon now, and there is some lovely pink blossom trees in full bloom, which makes the scenery quite lovely. Basketball is dead, for the simple reason that all of our balls broke. The ground has lots of sharp bits, and every single one of our balls are busted. Since they are so expensive to buy here, we have packed it in for the season. Keyrum (the billiard-like game played with plastic chips on a small square board) is also going out of fashion, as hands are frozen trying to flick the chips. Last time I saw a match, everyone clearly just wanted to get home and out of the cold. The chips also move a lot slower across the board which screws up the shots.

Socially these days, not much is going on either. Ten and I play chess every night. I go to McLeod every few days, for vegetables, and of course to visit Kalsang. We usually drink tea in about 4 different places (consecutively no less!), or if he's busy I just go to his house for a nap, and wait for him to finish to drive me and the veggies home on the bike. I have been running into a few of my nun friends here and there, and always enjoy chatting with them. This Sunday we are going to have a family dinner with Ten's aunts and uncles, as we have not seen much of them lately, what with me being ill and Ten working. They are very sweet and constantly call Ten to make sure he is taking care of me. Tenzin's aunts work in HH the Dalai Lama's temple with the butter lamps, so when I go up I always sit with them and have tea. A nice place to warm up for sure!

Another thing I have been missing these days is clean clothes. Honestly if things get washed every 2 weeks that is good. With the water and air so cold, it is almost impossible for my good old carpal tunnel hands to work. Ten always tells me to leave it and let him do it, but with everything he does, I feel bad asking him for help on his one day off a week. I am so grateful for the Mountain Equipment Co-Op layers I bought. They get me through this cold, and tend not to smell as bad after a weeks wear.

Yesterday I saw the biggest monkeys I have ever witnessed. They were grey with tiny black faces surrounded by a white lion's beard. Their tails stuck straight out, and I swear they must have been almost 200lbs each! They were beautiful but I definitely didn't want to get in their way so I moved it along. Monkey's kind of freak me out sometimes. Perhaps it is because they are so much like man.

I guess that's all for now. I miss you all. Please pray that Ten and I will be home soon.

Cho gee drokmo,
Dolma

Love,
Carr

Sat, Jan 2, 2010 BLOG #15

Happy New Year All:

Injie Losar-la Tashi Delek!,

I hope everyone enjoyed their holidays. We had planned on going up to a concert at TIPA, however Mary & Kalsang decided to move into their new house on New Year's Eve (which incidentally is only 2 doors down from us) so by the time we were done doing that, we were all wiped. Just sweeping the floor with our broom made of gathered hay took about 1.5 hours. There was one funny incident that I will not soon forget. The bathroom taps were leaking, but Kalsang decided to try and work around them because he wanted to wash his feet. Unfortunately, the taps came right off the wall, and Kalsang was literally blown on his ass, all four limbs splayed out, as the jet of ice cold water sprung from the plumbing (made even more funny because of his immense height and very long arms and legs). He was fully dressed in jeans and sweater when it happened, and it took him a good 15 minutes to get the faucet back on, where I jerry-rigged them with a rag. (Once Ten got home he got everything perfectly fixed....he even knew where the water shut off valve was somewhere on the roof...he is now Mary's hero). At this point all of their stuff was packed, so I ran next door to get my poor cousin a towel and some of Ten's clothes so he wouldn't freeze to death. It was the funniest thing that has happened here in months. Poor Kalsang...he was really good natured about it though.

Once Ten got home from work, we all went out to have dinner at a restaurant, then we turned in early. It was a good thing, because the streets were overflowing with Indians, (most of them young and intoxicated) and it was not a good place for a Western girl to be. At least one group assumed me to be a prostitute. There were nice lights hung up along the street though, and people were selling fried chicken and figs everywhere. (Yeah I know, weird combination).

Yesterday, Ten and I went down to Kangra with two of his workmates to take advantage of the New Year's clothing specials. The trip took about one hour of walking, and another hour on the "chicken bus" (our poor friend Lotse was throwing up out the window most of the way). There were lots of street sellers, but also a decent sized "department store" (think if Honest Ed's in Toronto went ghetto) in this town, which is what the boys were keen on. They bought jeans (one of the few places you can buy ready made clothes instead of going to a tailor) and both Ten and our friend Tsering got a large rice cooker/veg steamer for almost 30% off (Ten has been dying to buy one of those for the longest time). We bought popcorn on the street from a vendor for about

23 cents, which we all shared as we took our time strolling along. On the way back we decided to splurge on an autorickshaw (the almost hour ride cost about \$4.50 for the four of us plus packages), and it was much easier on everybody's stomach. The only problem is, the rickshaws have no sides or roof, only a canvas which covers your head. Lotse, Ten and I were in the back, and Tsering was almost sitting on the driver's lap in the front. By the time we got to Lower Dharamsala, I was frozen, so we opted for the bus up the mountain (warmer, individual seats, however, poor Ten had to puke out the window this time).

Yes, transportation can be fun. We had to go to Lower Dharamsala again today to get our tea kettle fixed. We walked down, but it is too far to go back up again. We got one of the infamous jeeps for the 30 minute ride up. The Jeeps are the same price as the bus (10 rps or so), however they have shocks so you don't feel like you have to vomit at every bump. The trouble is, they cram at least 12 people into a space designed for about 7. It is not uncommon to have people on the roof and hanging on the side as well. In the front seat, which would fit 2 people comfortably, there was 4 of us. Ten was beside the driver, which meant he had to straddle the gear shift. Half of the trip he had the shifting lever (and for that matter, the drivers hand) crammed up against his balls. LOL.....I made the mistake of taking that spot once thinking that he would not have another 2 people climb in...luckily Ten was with me and quickly changed spots to save me the disgrace. On this particular trip I lucked out, because a wealthy Indian guy was beside me (that is, I was basically sitting on his lap) so he was cleanly dressed and didn't smell, nor try anything. Our driver was especially brazen, and I swore we were going to crash head on with another vehicle about 4 times. At one point, an army van passed us, and his tire went over the mountain edge. By some stroke of luck, it caught on a sandbag that just happened to be sitting there, saving them from plummeting over the edge. It amazes me that more people don't die of vehicle fatalities!

Well that is enough for now. Ten and I send you our love and hope to see you all soon.

: -),
Carr

Bhod gyal lo,
Dolma

Thu, Jan 14, 2010 BLOG #16

Hello All; Mee Tsangma Tashi delek,

Well, since my last note Ten and I have had some very good news! Immigration at the Canadian Embassy in Delhi contacted us, and asked us for the final thing...Ten's passport. According to several other Tibetan-Canadian couples who have recently been through the same harrowing ordeal, this means a visa is no more than 1 month away. (Obviously, the Canadian government does not wish to hold onto anyone's passport longer than they need to, and it is just to confirm he has a pass in the flesh so they can affix the visa inside it). The letter stated that while at this point a visa is not guaranteed (Ten still needs to attend an interview to prove he is really him...this is mostly a formality to check that he is the guy on the passport though), that his visa would be

processed as quickly as possible at this point. We are expecting a letter soon calling him in for an interview, then with Visa in hand, we will be back in Canada ASAP. We are so excited to be coming home, and feel like we are truly on the home stretch. We have had some good omens as well. Tenzin found a knife and a bag with an elephant on it the other day....let me explain. Many of you know that elephants are considered lucky, so I was happy about that find. The knife though, is the best omen in Khampa culture. When one is found it is never thrown away, and a special ornamental box is built to keep it in a place of honour in the house. It is said to show the cutting through of all obstacles, and that it will bring the household good luck and fulfillment of wishes very quickly. Ten was ecstatic when he found it, and even brought it to the tailor shop, where his village mates started congratulated him on his extreme good luck. They are all sure we will be home by February....March at the latest.

For now it is freezing! Cold rains are sometimes coming, and without the sun, and the dampness in the air, I am literally chilled to the bone in the day. I just keep telling myself to get through one more day, and pray that the electricity doesn't go out, as it cuts off my only source of hope, our small space heater. (Unfortunately, the electricity constantly goes off). I will gladly welcome minus 30 weather in Canada, knowing that I can come inside to a heated house with hot water, a fridge, a washing machine, etc.

These days our routine is something like this:

6:30am wake up, make the bed,boil water, get breakfast (tsampa for Ten, yogurt with organic muesli, raisins and banana for me)

8:00am kiss Ten good bye, sweep out the house with my trusty hay broom, wash the dishes

9:00am try to watch something Western on TV, like "Friends", "America's Funniest Home Videos", "Chris Angel's Mind Freak", or if I'm really lucky, "So You Think You Can Dance"

9:30am enjoy a warm shower (the geyser has been on and heating for about 3 hours...enough to give me 5 minutes)

10:00am go next door to watch Kalsang paint for a bit, do the laundry, or read

12:00pm Do a long kora in the forest path around the temple to get some exercise, pick up fruit or yogurt for tomorrow's breakfast on the way

1:30pm Eat lunch at a restaurant if possible to try and get some protein and clean vegetables in me.

2:30 return home, sometimes stopping at an internet cafe, or chatting with friends on the road

3:00-5:00pm watch tv, read, etc. and try not to freeze my ass off while I wait for Ten in front of the crappy heater

5:30pm Welcome Ten home and serve him tea

6:30pm Eat a sandwich or something small and easy for dinner

7:00pm Read, talk, watch a movie, or help Ten study his Chinese or English

8:30pm bedtime!

I know, glamorous isn't it? Women for the most part are confined in the household here, so the only way I can "properly" be seen outside is doing the religious kora walk, or having vegetables in my hand to show I have been shopping. Sometimes Mary and I have lunch together, and it is so wonderful to talk with her.....a normal conversation where our strength in numbers cuts down on potential harassment.

Now let me try to think of a few random things that have happened lately to paint a better picture

of good old India.....

-A big white dog has recently befriended me. I suspect he found me a suitable "human shield" for him to cross over into a new territory. You see, beneath our apartment complex there is LOTS of garbage and food scraps. Only the local pack has territorial rights to it, and this dog is not from their group. When walking with a human though, an outside dog will only be growled at and maybe snipped at from the others...they would not dare an outright attack. So he often waits for me at the top of the 216 stairs that leads from the main road, down to my area of the village. He always walks me right to my door, and if any other people approach me, he looks me right in the eye to check if they are okay or a threat to me before he relaxes. I swear he understands everything I say. He also walks right in sync with me as if he has been my pet for years. The other day, when it was raining, I heard a knock at my door. Damned if it wasn't my dog friend coming to call on me, checking that I was okay. He knew enough not to try to come into my house; he literally just stopped by to say "Hi," and get out of the rain for a few minutes. What a funny guy! Indian dogs are so loyal.

-A creepy Indian guy on the street tried to lure me into a date with him the other day on the pretense that he would be honoured to mend the rips in the front of my shoes. Never heard that pick-up line before.

Prayers that you are all happy and well. Drop me an email and let me know what's going on. I expect to be sitting across from you within a month. Please put out the positive vibes for us. If everyone thinks positive, I am sure the universe will align for us.

Love always,
Carr

Rang gee go-ser,
Dolma

Mon, Jan 25, 2010 BLOG #17

Hello All; Tashi Delek drokpo drokmo tsangma,

Unfortunately Ten and I do not have anything new to report on the immigration front. We are still anxiously awaiting our letter which invites Ten in for his interview at the Canadian Embassy in Delhi. Once this is done we could be home in a matter of weeks. Keep sending out those prayers and positive thoughts on our behalf please! I cannot stress enough how desperate we are to get home. We even went through our books and clothes the other day, and donated everything we would not be bringing home with us to ensure we would be ready for a speedy getaway.

It is still cold here, and we have unfortunately hit the water-shortage season. What this means is that we generally only have water available to us for the first 5 or so hours of the day. This makes doing laundry extremely difficult, as well as trying to cook dinner. We always manage to get a bucket filled up before it runs out that sustains us throughout the day. My good old space

heater has certainly been put through its paces as the temperatures drop, and Ten has already had to repair the shoddy Indian wiring twice to keep it running. He also repaired the wiring for the entire building when it went down, as the "electrician" didn't know what to do. Ten is a very handy man!

We are looking forward to a visit from Tsultrim, Lungtok and I's neighbour and close friend from Toronto in the coming weeks. He is bringing me white cheddar mac and cheese, some peach ring gummies, and a Cosmo magazine. I made poor Lungtok buy all this stuff for me.....I can almost see the look of embarrassment on his face when he tries to read the cover stories on the front of the magazine....LOL.

Some Indian-isms for you...

Today I found a one year old Tibetan toddler crawling up a set of 300 stairs by himself. He tried to get me to carry him up to the main road so he could make his great escape from the nearby daycare centre below, but I scooped him up, and delivered him to a glass bead blowing shop halfway up the hill instead (where a woman recognized him....not at all concerned that he was crawling by himself in the freezing cold and covered with dirt). From what I got of her conversation to the infant, he was actually allowed to crawl up and down in this manner.

Right before this incident, I was nearly trampled by a runaway pack donkey coming down the aforementioned stairs (thank god the baby wasn't crawling unseen a few minutes earlier) who decided he wanted to take a different path to try and snatch a mouthful of grass before his owner caught up and beat him with a bamboo cane. These donkeys are a common sight here, as they haul away very heavy sacks of gravel and dirt from construction sights. They are always overloaded and sometimes I swear they must be minutes away from a broken ankles as you can see the stress over their hoof joints. Poor things.

That's all for now. Take care and we will see you as soon as humanely possible.

Love,
Carr