

Alan and Megan Barker

20 years in Nepal

July 2020



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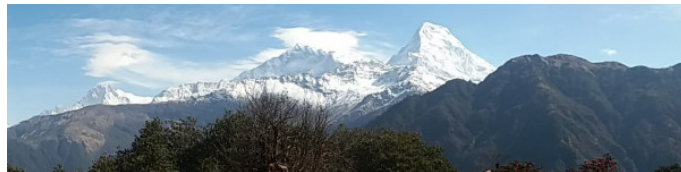
July 2020 marks twenty years since we first arrived in Nepal. As you know, Nepal is famous for Mount Everest (Sagarmatha as it is known here), Gorkha soldiers, and trekking holidays that take you, sweating and puffing, through stunning mountainous scenery. What people are less aware of are the many disasters that regularly inflict themselves on the country. Over the time that we have lived here, we have mentioned some of them in our newsletters but let us remind you. When we first arrived the 11-year civil war was raging. 11,000 killed and many thousands more injured and disabled. The 'Royal Massacre' in 2001 wiped out all but a few of the then royal family in one shocking night. In everyone's recent memory are the two earthquakes in the space of a couple of weeks that happened in 2015. Fast on the heels of the earthquakes came the blockade of the India-Nepal border that stopped imports of all essential goods and brought the entire country to a grinding halt for several months.

Nepal also suffers from regular 'extreme weather events'. Ninety people were killed by lightning strikes last year. On top of that are the annual monsoon seasons that spell death and destruction to remote communities from floods and landslides. Even as we write, it's monsoon and so far this season more than 60 people have died in landslides and floods. Dozens of houses have been damaged or destroyed and the monsoon still has at least 2 months to run yet. To cap it off this year there's even been locust swarms in some parts of the country destroying newly planted rice and vegetable fields.

Nepal also has a very turbulent society. Violent political groups very quickly bring parts of the country to a standstill through 'bandhs' ('closures' or 'strikes') – shops, offices and schools are forced to shut and traffic on the streets is stopped. And we've lost count of the number of riots and curfews that have affected everyday life in our time here. And there are the countless

individual disasters that strike families every day, such as health crises which we come across in the hospitals we've worked in.

And now there's Covid-19, lockdown, a destroyed tourism industry here, and Nepali migrant workers we mentioned last time, forced to return home penniless from India or the other countries that they had travelled to with the hope of escaping poverty. More mouths to feed and less money with which to do it.



However, one thing that all the above disasters have built into the Nepali people is resilience. They are used to insecurity in the present and uncertainty about what the future will look like. They have had to learn to cope when there are only limited and inconsistent social security and health structures. So, can we say COVID-19 is 'just another' disaster that somehow Nepal will have to deal with? Some days it has seemed like that. Now lockdown is easing, and it seems that everything is back to normal. Tick that disaster off – what's next? COVID-19 is different though. COVID comes on top of all the other things. It's COVID and the landslide that has just destroyed a village causing someone to have a spinal cord injury and in need of costly treatment. It's lockdown induced poverty and an unexpected leprosy diagnosis that causes the bottom to fall out of a family's world. It's COVID and the fact that some people are still living in temporary accommodation five years after the earthquakes or three years after the terrible flood that inundated several areas. It's lockdown induced loss of income on top of the 'normal' level of grinding poverty in which many have to live.

What can be done? Does it all sound too bleak? Out of control? Hopeless? Well, we wouldn't be here if we thought that was the case. We are privileged to be working in an organisation that offers hope in all these difficult situations. That hope comes as our organisation makes a difference to that one family who has just run out of food and has no hope of getting any tomorrow either. As it gives rehabilitation to the individual with a spinal cord injury, or treatment to a person with leprosy whom no one else will go near. As people are empowered to work together to provide food for their families and earn an income. Thank you for being part of making a difference.



As you know to be part of all this we need visas, and have spoken of the problems of getting them many times. It's great to be able to let you know that since we last wrote, we've been granted visas up to next March!

Our other news is that we now plan to be back in the UK from the end of September and expect to be 'on tour' from mid-October to early December. This is earlier than we mentioned in our previous letter.



Thank you for your ongoing interest, prayers and support. It means a lot.

Love to you all and hope to see many of you before the year ends

Alan and Megan

If you would like to support Alan and Megan Barker by prayer and committed regular giving, visit bmsworldmission.org/partners or call 01235 517617 for a 24:7 Partners leaflet.



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