

August 2016

Dear Friends,

This letter is long overdue. Let me start back in April.

In my last letter, I requested special support for the children who graduated out of our school last year. Before I start on new news, I would like to thank the people who stepped up for this. Thankfully, we found sponsors for all our graduates! They have been attending their new school since April and are all doing very well.



At least the benches shown here have all four legs!

Also last April I started wondering how the students would write notes in the coming year. Our writing benches were in a desperate state of disrepair. Some could be fixed, but we also needed several new tables made. I simply had no money at the time. Then, I got a surprise email from Benares SchoolFund Foundation (<http://www.benaresschool.nl/nl/homepage/>), an organization that supports schools like ours. They had gotten funding for several items on my wish list including not only benches, but also a computer lab upgrade, laptops for teachers to use at school, and a public address system. Wow! (If you visit their website, you may be interested to read pgs. 2-4 of this year's newsletter)

Our landlord, after a year's delay, had also finally agreed to paint the building. So we had an extremely busy summer! Because of the painting, we had to move each and every item out of 16 rooms and back, including the library and teachers' resource rooms. Sore muscles! We were also busy researching our purchases, finally settling on buying four desktop systems for our computer lab and four laptops for teacher use. I've been so happy to see them since, using videos and extra worksheets to liven up their classrooms.

We've needed a large speaker for several years now. It was impossible for everyone to hear, especially when a student was addressing the entire student body. But, after extensive research (I thought I would never find the system I wanted in India), I finally located a rechargeable system with a large enough range. This system allows us to use it whether we are in the back field or indoors. Everyone can finally hear the "thought of the day" that gets shared each day during assembly. We can also use it during special programs for karaoke singing, dance, and speeches. (It came with a couple wireless microphones and can connect via USB or bluetooth.)



The carpenter was busy building writing tables and the kids got busy afterwards painting them. Then came my turn, trying to clean up the paint drips they had left behind! We finished painting the last set of tables the day before school re-opened! Whew!

On June 30, the first day of school, with the newly painted walls, new tables, and newly painted blackboards, the classrooms looked great. Since then we've had a "keep your classroom clean" campaign with a promised prize to the kids with the cleanest classroom after inspection in December. I've noticed that some classrooms are going the extra mile scrubbing light switches and other previously neglected corners!

The school got off to a good start with the smoothest new admission process ever. I've been so pleased about how our students have welcomed the 40 newcomers this year. Normally, it takes until September or so to get the new kids integrated, but we were already there with a good family feeling about three weeks ago. Our most notable incident was the new 6th grade boy who broke his arm trying to climb one of the trees in the back. When he showed up in my office (preceded by 3-4 kids who, with opening and closing but speechless mouths, tried to tell me that something had happened) and held up his arm it was so absurd it took a few seconds to register what I saw. His forearm formed an S shape.

So, of course, the kids were horrified, and it may be the lesson that will stick the longest for them this year. No one has tried to climb the tree since. The boy is fine. His cast was removed yesterday.



The blue line shows the typical extent of the river. The long green arrow shows my normal route to school. The smaller arrow shows the roof of a cow shed (to give you an idea of the water depth). By now the water has nearly reached the roof of the shed.

I must now mention the flood. It's again that time of year when the Ganges River rises. When I started writing this three days ago, the river had not yet reached the level of the back playground (the group photo below was taken on Aug 15th), but the water has now completely covered the ground and is just 6" or so from entering the ground floor of the school. (The ground floor of my house is covered to a depth of 5", but I live upstairs.) If the news reports are correct, the water should

stop rising today. The school ground floor is largely open; all the classrooms are upstairs. The main effects of the flood on the school are:

- the back pathway to school will remain underwater for some time. Taking the longer, dry route adds about 20 minutes to the journey. This situation started two weeks ago when a small portion of the path was covered in water.
- We have an unexpected holiday. So far we've had two days off, and we are likely to be closed a few extra days next week also.
- Some kids' (and two teachers') homes are underwater, and
- sickness is likely to follow the flood.

Please pray that the water will begin receding soon and that the families will take care to avoid as much sickness as possible. (For those of you who remember the great flood of three years ago, the high point this year is predicted at a level about 4' lower than that flood.)

We celebrated Indian Independence Day on August 15th. Here, although no classes are held, the children make sure their uniforms are cleaned and pressed and everyone goes to school for a patriotic remembrance program. Here are a couple photos taken on that day:



We can normally see the dirt at the base of this tree! (Taken from my roof two days ago. The Ganges looks massive in the background.)



Three of our 7th graders. Vishvajeet who really should get a bit more serious about studies; Abhay who is emotionally and physically abused by his alcoholic father but doing his best to study and protect his three younger brothers (also in our school); and Bechu, who, when I asked him what he would become when he grew up, said, "What will you make me become?" That's trust for you.



I have just pulled the rope which opens the flag to allow flower petals to fall. Our students will now begin to sing the national anthem, a prayer written by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. . . .

An English translation of the anthem (with my notes are in brackets) follows; I heartily join in this prayer.

*Thou art the ruler of the minds of all people, dispenser of India's destiny.
Thy name rouses the hearts of Punjab, Sind, Gujarat and Maratha,
Of the Dravid and Orissa and Bengal [all regions of India];
It echoes in the hills of the Vindhya and Himalayas [mountains of India],
mingles in the music of Yamuna and Ganga [rivers of India]
and is chanted by the waves of the Indian Sea.
They pray for thy blessings and sing thy praise.
The saving of all people waits in thy hand,
thou dispenser of India's destiny,
Victory, victory, victory to thee.*

If you'd like to see our students in a one-minute video (put together from photos that were taken on "portrait" day), [click here!](#)

We are in a strange financial situation right now. We had plenty of money for the special projects that I mentioned, but I had to borrow money to pay rent and salaries in July. If you are able to make a donation, we would really appreciate it!

love,
Connie