

Reflections on ten years in Okhaldhunga

1984-1995, and beyond

1984-1995: Our Hope and Faith was not big enough!

For nearly eleven years, Okhaldhunga hospital, church and district was the centre of our thinking and prayers. For all that those years were ones of great blessing for us and our family, we lived with uncertainties and anxieties.

How would the hospital survive? Before the democracy movement, the government was often ambivalent about having a Christian hospital; the recurrent budget was hard to fund; staffing was problematic at times; we didn't feel that UMN was always supportive.

Would the church survive and grow ? Only a trickle of new believers were added to our number, and many left under the pressure of being Christians in a remote community. Persecution was fierce at times, with Pastor Hari Bhakta and Rana Bahadur in jail. But Hari Bhakta, Pan Sari, Dandi Raj and his family, Rana Bahadur and his family, Tek Narayan and Nir Maya and Hom Karna remained firm in their faith and witness and the Umbu Church was established and growing, while we heard of isolated groups and lone believers around the district. It all seemed very precarious!



Church group, early 1980s

Would the environment survive? Major landslides took away fields, homes and even people (Rampur lost 33 lives one night) with each monsoon, and the population continued to expand while the forests, even viewed from our backyard, shrunk progressively.



Overlooking Okhaldhunga, early 1990s

Would the community health messages be heeded? Mothers with seven children were common; there were annual deadly outbreaks of dysentery; few toilets; worms and parasites the norm in every stool test; vaccinations not used.

Would the district develop? Rumours of roads, a couple of phones in the mid-nineties, an electricity supply that was far too limited. So many promises, so little actually happening.



Debbie treats a young patient in the hospital

Landmarks:

General:

Earthquake
Electricity arrived
Planes became more frequent and reliable
Roads got closer
Democracy movement and overthrow of Panchayat system,
religious freedom
Landslides in Rampur
Phones

Church:

Persecution of Christians, including the arrest of Pastor Hari Bhakta KC and Rana Bahadur Shrestha.
Pan Sari Rai, the first Tekanpur Christian.

Bishnu and Sanat Sunuwar. Bishnu became a Christian in about 1980 and was a constant source of inspiration and steadiness through our years in Okhaldhunga. She taught us a great deal about being health workers in the hills. A church was planted in Uumbu by Satoshi and Masako

A church building was finally constructed in about 1987, and rebuilt after earthquake so we could move from the hospital CHP building. During persecution, the meetings returned to the hospital for safety.

Hospital/project:

Visit of Princess Helen Shah (1986)
Rebuilding after earthquake (1989-1993) and in preparation for Rural Development personnel
Community Health Project split into PHC and RD (1989) with the influx of high-level Nepali and expat staff.
New water system (1993)
New and bigger generators (ongoing)
Major surgery re-established (ongoing)
Establishment of the Nutrition Centre and high-risk pregnancy hostel (Maternal Waiting Home)
Nepalisation of the business manager post and medical director post
Okhaldhunga-isation of maintenance manager and all nursing posts
Formal training of several ANMs at Jiri Technical school, locally trained nurse aides
Establishment of Sobru School (1993).
One of first five phones in the district placed in hospital (1994)
Ultrasound established ... one of the first rural ultrasounds in Nepal (1991).
Tutorial group for expatriate children established in 1988

Personal:



Rebuilding following the earthquake, 1988



Mick sees patients on the veranda after the earthquake



Tutorial group kids take a break

So many friends from all round the world, with diverse skills and interests.
Learning from friends and colleagues, especially the experienced Nepali staff and Christian brothers and sisters.
Children who became lifelong friends of our children
Learning to appreciate differences of approaches to medicine, God and development from an international team.
Working together as a team with common goals.
The death of Caroline Doehne, and too many other children taken away by dysentery and other diseases, and the courage of parents in the face of these tragedies.

Visits in 2007 and 2009:

The hospital was bursting at the seams. So many of our old colleagues were still working there, joined by many with fresh visions and energies for "Pyaro Okhaldhunga". Already expansion was on the cards. The recurring budget had continued to be provided, in spite of our fears of so many years before. The hospital was now a place of teaching for Nepali doctors!

The church was booming, and even some of the most ardent critics of previous years were now believers, a trend that continues to today.

The forests have returned! In some ways, this was for me the most miraculous change as, even while praying for it, I could never believe in it! It speaks volumes of the Okhaldhunga people having a future in the hills and their respect for the environment.

Toilets, drinking water and family planning were in evidence: looking through the daily record of stool tests, parasites and worms were the exception rather than the rule. Polio is gone, tetanus is rare.

Development had arrived: phones, internet, roads and electricity! Beyond our wildest dreams of just 15 years before!



Mick & Debbie "on the trail" above Okhaldhunga, late 1980s.

We do not know what the future holds for Okhaldhunga, but we can only rejoice and be thankful for what has been achieved in the fifteen years since we had the privilege and joy of living there. The current plans for expansion show how unfounded our fears were, and demonstrate the courage of the people that are looking after the hospital at present. We salute them for that courage and vision, and commit to praying for the future

they are planning for. We took on the hospital with a legacy of service and were privileged to pass it on to others.

Mick and Debbie Langford

Serving with INF in Jumla, 2012