

Living in *Luxury's* lap!



By Gael McInnes

When I stepped off the plane at Kathmandu, Nepal, I was speechless because as we landed, I spied soldiers in sentry boxes along the runway.

Sure the country had had some Maoist incursions, but this?

I wasn't prepared for the level of poverty and hardship that I saw. It was like stepping back into the 14th century. The bazaars were colourful and noisy, and there were plenty of bargains, but I had to watch where I walked, as sacred cows and goats left dung everywhere!

The temples were foreign to my



Young girl in Nepal carrying her infant brother. Photo by Gael McInnes

Christian upbringing, and having sacred monkeys living in them also brought rather a filthy environment, which to me detracted from the temples' 'beauty' and purpose. There were so many ancient forms of art and architecture to be seen in this country. The linger of heavy diesel fumes from aging and noisy vehicles and 'put-puts', filled the air and my sinuses.

As I travelled down to Pokhara Valley on a winding one lane road, I was amazed at the beauty of the landscape. The Himalayas are truly majestic. The terraced fields were either being worked by oxen and hand made ploughs, or individuals – mainly women, using small hand held hoes. A back breaking job. Terrace after terrace being worked by families trying to make a living and put food on the table.

A section of the sealed road was being 're-chipped' by a couple of men. Others were breaking the rocks by hand into smaller stones and chips, and yet another was heating bitumen with fire under a cut down 40 gallon drum. I was told that certain families took responsibility for sections of the road near to where they lived. A far cry from the sophisticated road work teams in New Zealand.

Houses were made of hand made bricks, mud and some thatching, with living quarters upstairs, and animals underneath. The warmth from the animals would rise to help warm the occupants above. Puts a

new meaning on heat ventilation, doesn't it? Even with these harsh surroundings, I found the Nepalese people very friendly, and they appeared happy.

My 'Hotel' accommodation was a challenge, as a shower consisted of a pipe poking out of the wall, absent of shower rose, and a bucket. Cold water only!

What if you had to live under a sheet of corrugated iron held up by a stick, as I saw a woman holding a baby do in India?

I could go on, but I'm not one to complain, just explain. I have travelled to other countries like India and Thailand and throughout the Pacific Islands, and I'm amazed at the resilience of the people. Experiencing 'other cultures' gives me a great sense of appreciation for what I have in New Zealand. I can live quite happily without luxuries.

What is a luxury anyway? It's something that we choose in the way of luxurious comfort, be it our homes, the contents, our food, cars, or clothes, so we can get enjoyment from them. A luxury is often said to be self-indulgence. Luxuries mean different things to different people.

To me luxury is having a roof over my head, clothes on my back, food in the stomach, family, friends, and living in a country free from war.

When we had the power blackout a few short years ago, there was an uproar. People couldn't watch television, play their favourite music or use their computers or internet, or heat their meals in the microwave. They complained about not being able to boil a kettle. Be grateful you had a kettle to boil, a TV to watch, power most of the time, or power at all!

People these days moan about being without their luxuries. Try living somewhere where you don't have power, where water is scarce and food mainly comes in tins, or what you can catch from the sea, or gather from the bush. Yes, I have done that. I worked as a nurse for 3 years on an isolated Aboriginal settlement on the Cape York Peninsula, in Northern Queensland. The only luxury was a house and a comfortable bed. It was a humbling experience. Kerosene lamps gave night light, a primus cooker heated the kettle and cooked the meals, and at times water was rationed to a bucket a day per person. Being brought up to rely on tank water supplies prepared me for this. It was not a burden to have a 'bucket bath'. The sea was on my doorstep.

I believe we take our luxuries for granted. What if you had to live under a sheet of corrugated iron, held up by a branch stick, as I saw a woman, who was holding a baby, do in India? What if you had to go out and cut your wood from scarce resources, and cart it on your back, trekking uphill, as I saw in the Himalayas? A daily necessity so you could boil your kettle and cook, let alone keep you warm.

How about the job of mixing cow dung with straw, and making cow 'patties' to throw handfuls onto the side of your mud house to dry. Again, a necessity for fuel in isolated parts of India, as most of the trees have been destroyed and used for fuel, but never replaced. How about leading your oxen around in a circle all day, drawing water from deep wells for crops and personal use? Yes, I've seen all that, and it makes me grateful that I live in a country of plenty.

Of course the greatest blessings in life are not based on economics. What price can you put on freedom, friendship, family and health? Here in New Zealand most of us are blessed with abundance of these things as well as economic plenty.

Have you ever thought about what luxuries you might be able to do without, so you could perhaps sponsor a World Vision Child, or give to

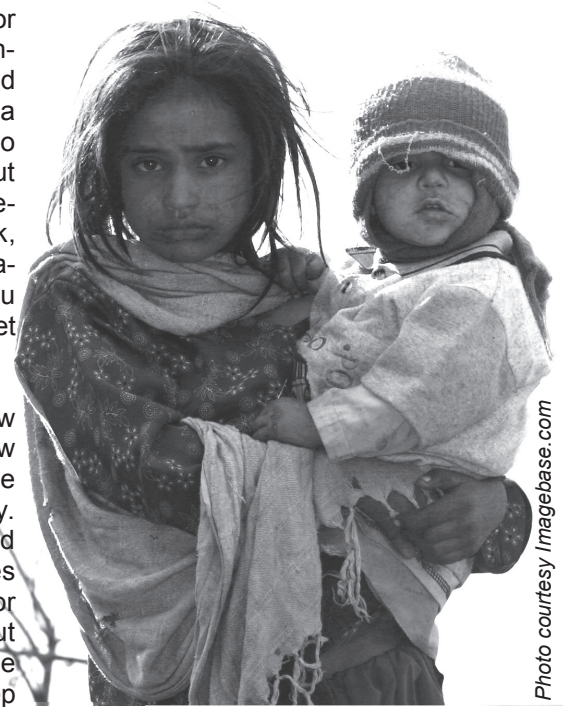


Photo courtesy Imagebase.com

some other worthy cause, either overseas, or in your local community?

Have you ever thought about what luxuries you might be able to do without, so you could perhaps sponsor a World Vision Child, or give to some other worthy cause?

Take time to ponder the plight of others not so well off as yourself. There are needy people everywhere. There might even be a needy family living next door to you! Is there some way you can step outside your comfort zone from time to time, to experience how others live? I hope you are thankful for what you have.

We are indeed living in the lap of luxury!



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*A brickyard worker's dwelling in Nepal.
Photo courtesy Rod Matthews.*

