

Roots to a Brighter Future

WINTER 2010 ISSUE

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Hurray! The Girls' School is Complete.

In our quest to bring education to unfortunate children of eastern Tibet, VDF embarked on an aggressive campaign to raise money to build a classroom and dormitory for 15 girls less than a year ago. Through generous donations from donors and sponsors during the *Holiday Drive* (December 2009) and the *Books & Beds at 14,000 ft.* silent auction (May 2010), VDF raised over \$14,000 in order to make this dream come true!

But even with funds in place, the construction of the school faced many challenges. Construction was scheduled to begin in May after the snow melt; however, heavy spring rains, mudslides and a lack



Construction of girls' school, July 2010

of skilled workers, delayed the construction of the school for six weeks. But with the perseverance and leadership Tashi Rinpoche and Lama Che Che, the school was completed mid September and the girls are soaking up knowledge and experiencing education for the first time in their lives.

VDF will continue our mission to provide equal opportunity for educating girls and boys in rural nomad villages.

We believe all children should be given equal opportunity to learn and to reach their fullest potential and we thank you for your continued support!

Remarkable Journey: VDF members visit the school

This past July, four members of VDF: Wendy Wong, Aimee Ford, Paul Thomson and Michele Wentzel, traveled to the school for the first time since the boys' school was complete in 2008. Goals for the trip were to meet the students, gather infor-

mation (bio-data) about each one, evaluate the boys' school and to check on the status of the girls' school construction.

We finally arrived – after an arduous 3-day journey– and were overwhelmed by the generosity of the lamas and teachers who housed

and fed us, and by the spontaneous energy of the students.

There is so much information to share with our friends— our donors and supporters. Please enjoy a few notes from our trip on the next two pages.





Mr. Tang, our fearless driver, crossing a river.

Saturday, July 24-Monday, July 26:

The team — Wendy, Aimee, Paul and Michele — began an arduous 3-day journey from Chengdu, China to the village of Kham. The dirt road led us through countless miles of beautiful scenery ascending from 1,600 ft to over 14,000 ft. During our last overnight (Luhuo), we picked up Tulku Tashi, the project manager for the school. We finally reached the remote nomad village where the school site is located after crossing five bridgeless rivers.



Students lined the road to welcome us.
The school is in the background.

Monday July 26: Evening arrival: An emotional welcome

We were greeted by over one hundred students and lamas who lined the road leading up to the school waving ceremonial khatas (white scarves). The haunting wail of the dungchens (long trumpets) played by the lamas resonated through our bodies and out to the vast mountain range surrounding the school. We were finally here!

Tuesday, July 27: Time with the boys

We toured the boys dormitories in the morning. Each 10 ft. x 12 ft. room consists of four beds on one side of a dividing wall and another bed and stove on the other side. The team met the teachers and observed a typical morning in class with the boys chanting sutras. Later, we took the class outside and introduced ourselves. Translations were time consuming since Wendy translated from English to Mandarin, and our interpreter, Tenzin, translated Mandarin to Tibetan. The boys cheered for us and for the donors of VDF! They are very thankful for the support and are happy to be in school. Next, we collected bio-data on the boys (name, age, height, orphan status). Each boy had their photo taken and received treats. The boys are energetic and eager to learn about the world.



Girls now attending the girls school.

Wednesday, July 28: Time with the girls

Today, we collected bio-data on the girls who will begin school after the construction of their school is complete. We noticed that several girls were in need of healthcare. One girl has a deformed leg, which will need surgical correction some day. Two others had eye problems: "pink eye" and crossed eyes. One of the younger girls looked listless and had difficulty focusing on simple tasks. Without knowing exactly what the cause of her condition is, we can only assume it is from lack of access to basic healthcare and nutrition. VDF will arrange to have the girls with health problems go to a clinic soon. It takes nearly a day of driving to get to the nearest clinic and finding transportation is often a challenge.

Class time: The girls were invited to participate in class. Michele and Paul led half the class in an art lesson while Wendy and Aimee conducted a math lesson. We were very impressed with their knowledge and the creative minds!

Later that afternoon, we visited four families of our students. All were grateful to have their children go to school and did not want them to live the hard lives they lived herding yak and gathering herbs/fungi. The nomad diet consists of tsampa (roasted barley flour) rice, and yak yogurt. While this provides protein, fiber, and calcium, the diet lacks valuable nutrients. We were all overwhelmed by their hospitality and learned a lot about nomadic life.



Wendy (front) and Aimee teaching math.



Everybody brush!

Thursday, July 29: Hygiene Instruction

Aimee taught all the children how to properly brush their teeth in order to have healthy teeth and gums. We passed out new toothbrushes and laughed as the students brushed vigorously. We also taught the students the importance of washing their hands to prevent the spread of germs. One of the boys volunteered to wash his hands with hot soapy water in front of the class.

Friday, July 30: Interviews with the girls

All the students have their own personal story about how they arrived at the school. Some are difficult to hear. One girl's father abandoned her after her mother died and he remarried. Another girl's mother sent two of three children to different orphanages after their father left them. But there is hope. When we asked the girls what they would like to be when they grew up, most responded that they wanted to be a teacher. Gasang Drema, nicknamed "the brave one" said she wanted to be a driver.



Sonam Rinpoche

Sonam Rinpoche's arrival

Sonam Rinpoche made a grand entrance to the village escorted by Khampa motorcyclists, a police vehicle in a convoy of his students from Malaysia. Many of the nomads were in tears; honored by his presence.

Saturday, July 31: Puja

Rinpoche participated in a puja ceremony, also presided by the monastery's Rinpoche, and Tulku Tashi. During the puja, we distributed winter chubas (robes) to the boys. Later that evening, Aimee gave first aid training to the teachers so that they can treat simple health concerns of the students.



Sunday, August 1: Tearful goodbyes

It was difficult to leave the school. We made such strong connections with the teachers, lamas, and of course students. The boys and girls are forever in our hearts and minds and this trip has strengthened our resolve to continue our mission to provide education and a safe home to these students.

Now Taking
Orders!

Holiday Giving

Gourmet Karma Kookie & 2011 Calendar

Holiday Giving donations for gourmet Karma Kookies or 2011 calendar will provide food for the Tibet School for February to May 2011.



Karma Kookies

Tempt your tummy with the warm spice of Sichuan along with the smoky, buttery, nutty flavors of tsempha, the Tibetan staple food. These cookies are high in fiber and low in gluten. Delicious!



Kham, Tibet 2011 Calendar

Take a journey to Kham, Tibet. This 2011 calendar showcases the incredible beauty of the land and the remarkable students who attend the school there. Enjoy an amazing photo each month.

The last day to order is **December 3**, cookie will be delivered to you on December 13 to 18. For more information visit www.vdfus.org.

Did you know that a \$1 donation will feed 2.5 children, 3 meals a day in the remote part of Tibet? Please donate this holiday season and share the cookies and/or calendars with your family and friends. No gift is too small. Thank you!

Tibet Fest 2010

August marked the third year VDF participated at the TibetFest in Seattle, which is hosted by the Tibetan Association of Washington. This was a particularly exciting year for us as we featured photos and a slide show of our trip to the school and Eastern Tibet. During our trip, we brought back many Tibetan crafts, including necklaces, charms, and prayer bracelets. We also brought some original artwork by the students, many of whom have an artistic streak! We were pleased to meet so many people who were interested in the school and what VDF is doing to support the students and teachers.



We featured a raffle for a Starbucks basket, a Chocolate basket, and an original woodblock Chenrezig print from the famous Dege Scripture Printing House. The Dege print was by far the most popular item — several people bought \$10 or \$20 worth of tickets for the print! The lucky winner, Steve S., a man who loves woodblock prints, only had to purchase one ticket to win! Thanks to everyone who stopped by our booth to talk to us! We are looking forward to being at the Tibet Fest again next year.

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VDF is a Federal 501 (c)(3) tax exempt organization.

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Save the Date!

It's going to be great!

April 16th

2011 Chocolate & Wine Auction

South Bellevue Community Center
14509 SE Newport Way

7 to 9:30pm

VDF will be hosting our **2nd Annual Auction** featuring great wines, a river of chocolate goodies and fabulous auction items.

Next year's auction goal is to raise enough money to bring running **water** to the school.

We are very pleased to announce that our spiritual leader and founder of the school project, **Sonam Rinpoche** will be honoring us by attending the auction next year. During his three-month visit in WA, he will also be presenting seminars about compassion. A schedule of his speaking engagements will be posted on our website early next year.



Sonam Rinpoche

Mission: To provide a home and education opportunity for needy Tibetan children and seniors in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Eastern Tibet), China.

The school project was initiated by **Sonam Rinpoche**, a native Tibetan, who was recognized as the reincarnation of Ahzom Losel Rinpoche by **H.H. 14th Dalai Lama** and H.H. Dordrubchan Rinpoche. Rinpoche has earned the title “Khenpo”, which is equivalent to a Ph. D, after 18 years of Buddhism philosophy studies in Tibet and India.

To read more about Sonam Rinpoche, the school progress or how you can help, please visit our website at www.vdfus.org.

For questions, please email info@vdfus.org



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