

The Kailash Bodhi School in Jumla and how I got the idea to come here -
My first report.

I feel like it's time to tell you something about the Bodhi Kailash school in Jumla and about it being the reason why I came here.

One could wonder, how a 20 year old girl from Germany gets the idea to set off into the Himalaya to go to Jumla, a wonderful little city in one of the most remote areas of Nepal - instead of going to places like New Zealand, Australia or maybe England, like most of her classmates are doing.

To tell you the reason for this, I want to explain how my connection to the schools developed. There are three Kailash Bodhi schools in Nepal. One is in Kathmandu, one is in Jumla and one is in Simikot. Two of these schools (the ones in Kathmandu and Simikot) are supported by a small organisation in Tübingen, Germany (www.patenschulen.de) which is run by a group of really wonderful and warm hearted people.

When I was in class eight (if my calculation skills didn't leave me completely that should have been in 2012) I had to do quite a big project for school and while I was wondering what to do it on, the idea of doing something for one of these schools evolved.

At this point I want to thank my mom, because without her I would have never gotten in touch with these schools or the ideas around them at all.

She went to Nepal a few month before I had to do this project and visited the Kailash Bodhi school in Kathmandu. And she also has a close relation to the people who run the organisation in Tübingen. So I was very happy when my class 8 project worked out successfully and I was able to raise enough money (with the help of a lot of very wonderful and open minded people) for 1 teacher to teach and 5 students attending the school without paying school fees for one whole year.

Afterwards I was focusing on my own school in Germany (no, not by supporting it only by attending and studying) for quite a long time.

Until, suddenly, 13 years were over and I had written my final exams and wasn't to be called a student anymore. What I knew at that time was that I wanted to travel and that I wanted to get back in contact and do something for the schools in Nepal. So emails and phone calls were exchanged, a lot of questions were asked and things were organized until it was confirmed. I would be able to go to the Bodhi Kailash school in Jumla for two months to teach english.

On the 2nd february I found myself in a plane to Kathmandu and that's how I got here.

By the time I'm writing this little report, these two months have almost passed already. And that's why I thought it's really urgently time to write a little bit about the school so you can get an image about everyday-school-life in Jumla.

The school is different to what I and probably most of you are used to from Germany or other western countries.

But it's lovingly and welcoming and I can definitely say I'm thankful to be here and to be able to experience this time. I will take so many thoughts, memories and values with me and there's probably not much more valuable I could have gained.

And because I don't want to only keep them to me I thought of sharing them with you in this third little report.

First of all I want to describe a typical school day and tell you a bit about the school itself.

The school building of the Kailash Bodhi school is situated close to the Jumla airport. It's quite a big building, made of cement and bricks. It has three stories, although the top one isn't finished yet, half of it still remains an open space which is waiting to be turned into an indoor assembly hall.

The school has a big yard, where you will find all the children playing in the morning and during break times. On this yard, attached to the school building is a stage, where the assembly or other gatherings are lead from.

In a small building orthogonal to the school are the toilets. One for the staff and 6 for the children. Opposite to it, across the yard, is the school canteen, a small building made out of corrugated metal where little snacks and sweets are sold to the children and where the teachers can get lunch (if they don't bring it themselves) and a cup of tea in the afternoon. (The students can get lunch there of course as well but I'll get to the lunch break later that's why I didn't write it yet).

School starts at 10 am (which is a very charming time compared to the 7.45am in Germany) but a lot of students meet earlier already to play on the yard with their friends. At 9.20 am the prayer time for the buddhist students starts. They gather on the stage and - accompanied by one or two teachers - do their praying together (for about 15 min). The assembly starts at around 9.45 am. That means all the students line up in long rows arranged by class (and size), facing the stage and the school building. The older students and teachers walk through the rows to check that everyone is standing in line and also (at least on Sundays) to check that their uniforms are put on properly and their fingernails and hands are clean. (Just in case you were a little bit confused about me mentioning the Sunday just now - yes, school and all the other businesses start again on Sunday. Saturday is usually the only day off and that's also how I came to realize how luxurious our German two-days-weekend is.) The Sunday here always feels a little bit like a Monday to me and it's quite funny because as a result of that my feeling for the weekdays is a bit mixed up all the time.

But every now and then there are some public holidays, mostly due to the Hinduism which is by far the most common religion here in Nepal (up to 80% of the population are Hindus), so sometimes you'll also have two days off a week.

Sorry I lost my track a little bit so now back to the assembly.

There's always one student who leads it. He or she stands on the stage with a microphone (which is most of the time working really well) and tells all the others what to do or what is next. The assembly has a certain procedure which usually looks like this:

First of all there is the morning prayer, so all the students fold their hands and bow their heads and pray together (if I was able to understand something I would tell you what it's about - but also without understanding anything I always enjoy listening to it). Second thing they do is to sing the national anthem together (that's my favourite part), afterwards there are some news read out and the thought of the day, also researched and read by the students.

On Tuesday and Friday they do some light exercise together and finally there is the march past, which means that all the students go to their classrooms in long rows, sometimes singing a sunday, monday, tuesday... weekdays song (did you notice it starts at sunday instead of monday?) or sometimes marching along to some music playing of a big portable speaker.

In between there is always a stand at ease - attention - hands side - hands up - clap - hands down - part, where the students do so - as synchron as possible. Every now and then there

is also a speech by the headmaster or anyone who wants to say something (which will be my turn soon too).

As I said before my favourite part is when they sing the national anthem together (if you have any access to internet right now I would recommend you to look for and listen to the national anthem of Nepal to get a clearer imagination of what I mean). Some of the kids are singing really loud and enthusiastically and I could just stand there and listen to them for ages.

Back in the classrooms the lessons start (usually) at 10 am. Every lesson goes on for 40 minutes and after 2 lessons there is always a 10 minute break. From 12.50 to 13.30 is the lunch break. The parents of the students who don't live too far away from school come with boxes and bags full of rice and maybe dal or vegetables and sit down around the school building and yard to wait for their children to come outside and eat their lunch. When you look down at it from the top of the school (where the principals family together with the tibetan teacher are usually taking their lunch), it looks a little bit like a very big and nice picnic group. The students who live too far from school for their parents to come (some of them walk for over 1 ½ hours to school because the government schools which are closer can't provide a good education) bring their lunch themselves, either also baht (rice) or the typical roti.

At 1.30 pm the lessons start again. Two of them are only 30 min because school always ends at 4pm. (Except for the higher classes they have a 9th period too).

To be honest I'm never too sure which one of the 4 hours after lunch are going to be the shorter ones because it swaps around so it's always like a little surprise when the bell will ring.

I have to tell you about our bell by the way because it is great. It consists of a small metal gong, a metal stick and badje, our bell-ring-man, who rings it at the right times. (I always wonder what he is doing in between the lessons but that's probably a mystery I'll never find out about.) When the periods change the students stay in their classes and only the teacher swaps the classroom.

Every class has its room in which all the lessons take place (except of sometimes the computer lesson or if the teacher takes the class outside).

Every classroom has a whiteboard and a plastic chair for the teacher. The students are sitting on (relatively small) wooden benches, usually three or four of them squeezed next to each other. They have their bags on their benches and their books on their bags. All in all one could describe it as a really cuddly atmosphere. (Especially in class 6... I'm every time again surprised how the 39 students all fit on the tiny benches).

Most of the classrooms have posters on the walls - drawn by the students. Except of a dustbin there's not much more in the classrooms. Every classroom has a big window at the back, sometimes with glass in the window frames, sometimes without. Some of the rooms also have a whole (about the size of a brick and facing outside) in the wall and I'm still trying to figure out what it is there for. The floor is uncovered and very dusty cement, same as the walls (although they are less dusty). It will still be done properly some time - but therefore a lot of money is needed. Same counts for the top etage of the building. There is the storage room for the school uniforms, the computer room/ library and the principal's office. And then there is a big open-air space which is waiting (as explained earlier already) to be turned into a wonderful indoor assembly and multiple purpose hall. The school is also planning on

building a fence around the yard. Whereas this might sound weird for some German students it's an absolutely common thing here to have a fence around the school ground. It protects the school from strangers entering (at day or at night), from homeless animals crossing the yard, from balls flying into the fields of displeased farmers and it eventually motivates the students to be more in time.

Another project would be to build a separate housing complex for the nursery and the LKG and UKG classes, to create a safer and small-children friendlier atmosphere for them.

The way Tenzin (the principal's wife) described all those things to me I could really imagine how wonderful the school would be, with all the students running around and playing and learning. But it's still a long way to go until all these projects will have been realized - and until then the main focus lies (fortunately) on good quality education.

After 6 hours of this education (at 4 pm) the school day is over for most of the students and they gather on the yard again for the afternoon assembly.

The stand in ease - attention... process is done again and the school sings their school song "we will overcome". Somehow every time I hear it it's still so very special and touching for me. Seeing all these students in this really quite different world and circumstances than what I grew up in - singing such a hopeful and somehow innocent song. And I can't help it but I always have to connect it with the hope for a better and easier future for them. And once you've been here and seen the school and met the wonderful people who keep it running you will find these thoughts being your hopes as well.

I wish for this hope turning into determination and action to help so all necessary steps can be gone... slowly and step by step but still keeping the focus on progress and development.