

Majestic Mountains, Fabulous Food, A Diverse Population And Amazing Illnesses

by Mark Lichtenstein & Cynthia West

BAYALPATA, Nepal — Namaste - greetings - to our community from Bayalpata, in far western Nepal. This evening, we walked 10 minutes down the hill from the room we are renting, to our favorite neighborhood restaurant. Nirpa Bahadur Kadayat, the owner, is said to be the best cook in town. The food is fabulous. Eating here is like eating in someone's home and we are always the center of attention. We communicate by practicing our Nepali while they try out their English. Several people always stop by either to get a look at us or to try to help.

As many of you may remember, we are in the Achham province of far western Nepal to volunteer at Bayalpata Hospital and the local school until mid-April. Nyaya Health is partnered with the government to bring health care to the more than 200,000 people in this district.

Each morning, we walk about 30 minutes from our village to Bayalpata Hospital. The surrounding terraced

hillsides have a backdrop of majestic mountains, from 3,000 to 4,000 foot hills nearby to 20,000 foot snow-capped Himalayan peaks. We find the view breathtaking. We are struck by the amazing panoply of visual delights that fill the landscape of our everyday lives. A small boy holding and caressing his pet chicken while walking to his destination, an elderly woman balancing a few armloads of fire wood on her head, slowly walking, and using her only free hand to greet us and say "Namaste." At the road's edge, women scrubbing down children from head to toe, while they yell at the top of their lungs at the completely frigid experience.

The diversities are dramatic, everyone with slightly different facial features since there are many ethnic nationalities, over 70 languages and several castes. We see well-dressed townspeople walking to a job who knows where, lanky teens trying to be cool in jeans listening to their cell phones or MP3 players, goat and cow herders with the animals, wide-eyed children laughing and then suddenly stopping and staring at us.

Sometimes, one of the children has the courage to yell out "hello" or some other English phrase and everyone giggles.

At the hospital, Mark sits with a doctor in the outpatient room and offers mentoring when the doctor reviews the case and asks for advice. The illnesses that come through the door are amazing: many people with active TB; a 16-year-old with severe rheumatic heart disease; women with traumatized pelvic organs from a traditional healer placing a stick in the uterus and leaving it there to produce sterility or induce an abortion. There are many fractures of arms, legs, and wounds that resist healing.

The inpatient ward is mostly women with severe end stage emphysema from breathing smoke during cooking. The hospital can do plain x-rays and very simple chemistries and diagnose TB sputum samples. Anything more complicated requires referral to bigger facilities that are 6 to 20 hours away by jeep.

One of the local high school English teachers has brought Cynthia into his classrooms for observation and evaluation of his classes. They will collaborate to bring some new methodologies for ESL into practice. She has also begun some tutorial work at the hospital with some of the employees.

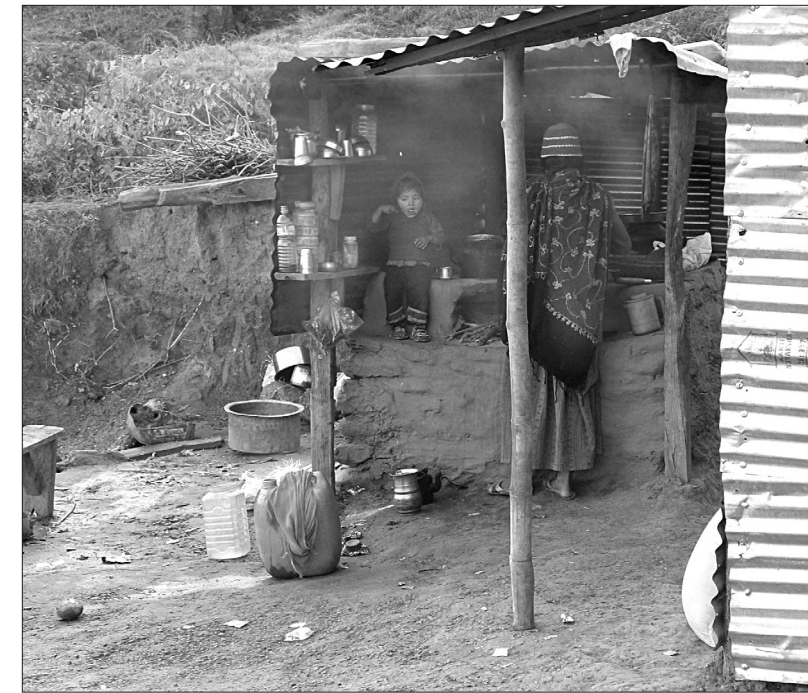
Most towns are accessible only by foot. People walk on footpaths. It is not uncommon for students at the local high school to walk one or more hours to begin their classes at 7 a.m. The drivable roads are narrow and often sparsely paved. Mud and rockslides are frequent. We had a memorable eight hour ride from the nearest city, Dhangadi, to go about 100 miles. We traveled over several 3,000-foot hills with non-stop switchbacks both up and down.

As we sat down to dinner with Nirpa tonight, we savored a local curried fish dish along with a rice pilaf and two special chutneys — which made it a very special meal for the weekly day of rest, Saturday. Along with that were curried vegetables, tarkaree, braised greens, called saag and last but not least, the lentil soup/sauce, dahl, often a blend of legumes such as black, yellow and green lentils. This is generously scooped onto the rice to moisten and add flavor. The Nepalese eat with their hands, but we always get a spoon.

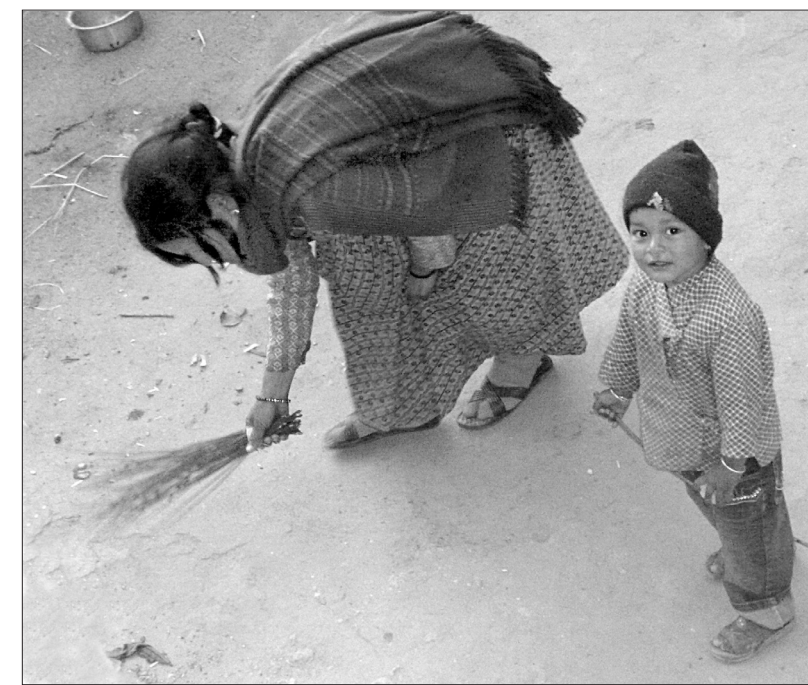
Tomorrow we will wake up to our neighbor's rooster crowing and will look forward to the adventures that unfold as we begin our second week here in Bayalpata, Nepal.

Read more about Nyaya Health's work at Bayalpata Hospital here: <http://www.nyayahealth.org> and <http://blog.nyayahealth.org>.

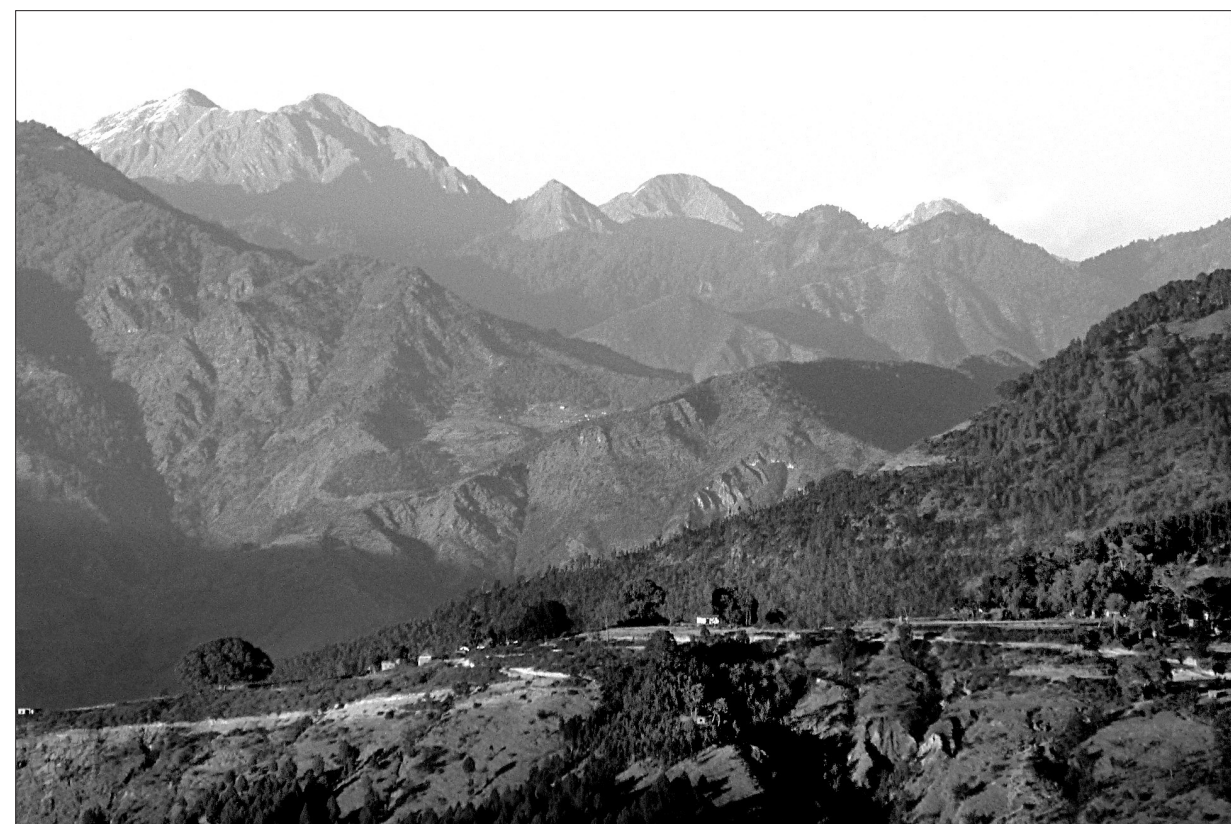
Residents of Greensboro, Lichtenstein is a physician at the Hardwick Area Health Center and West is on the faculty at Johnson State College.



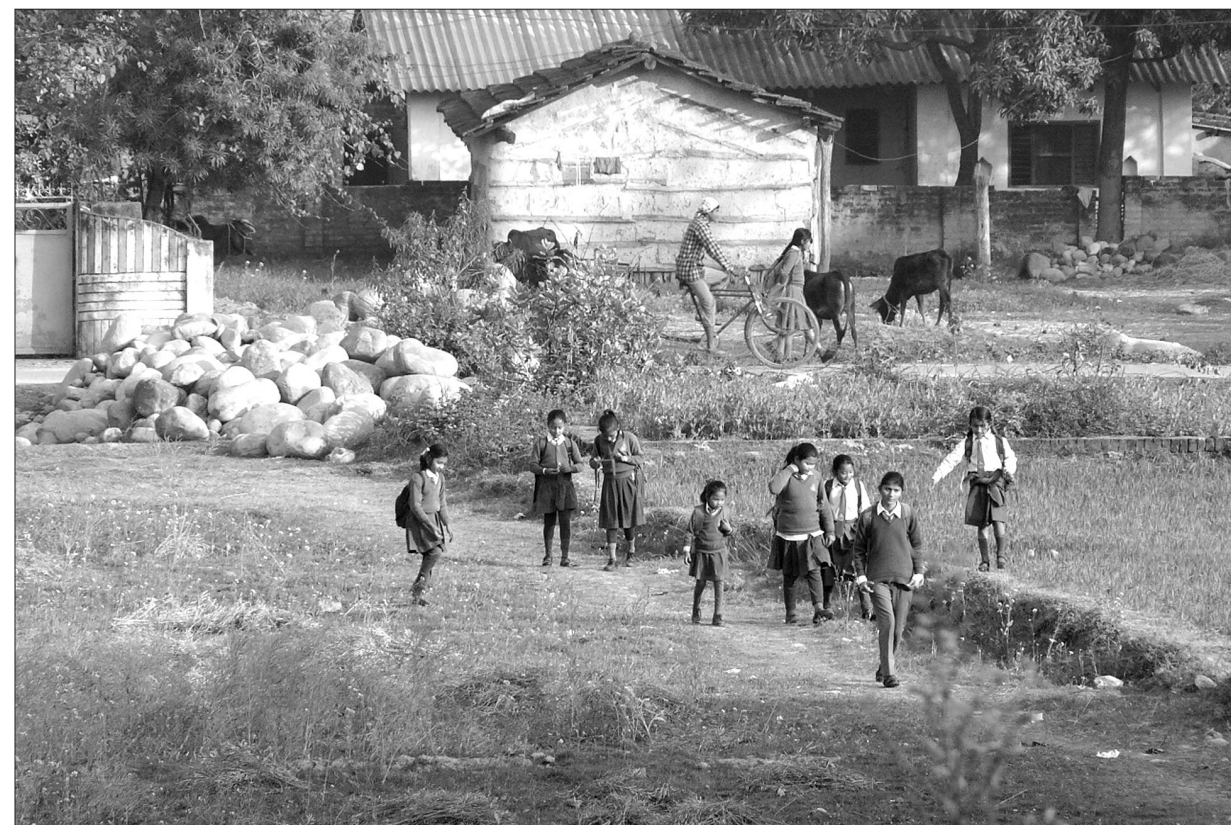
An outdoor kitchen provides many delightful and delicious dishes.



A young mother uses a handful of twigs to brush off the ground as her young child looks up. They live in Bayalpata in far western Nepal.



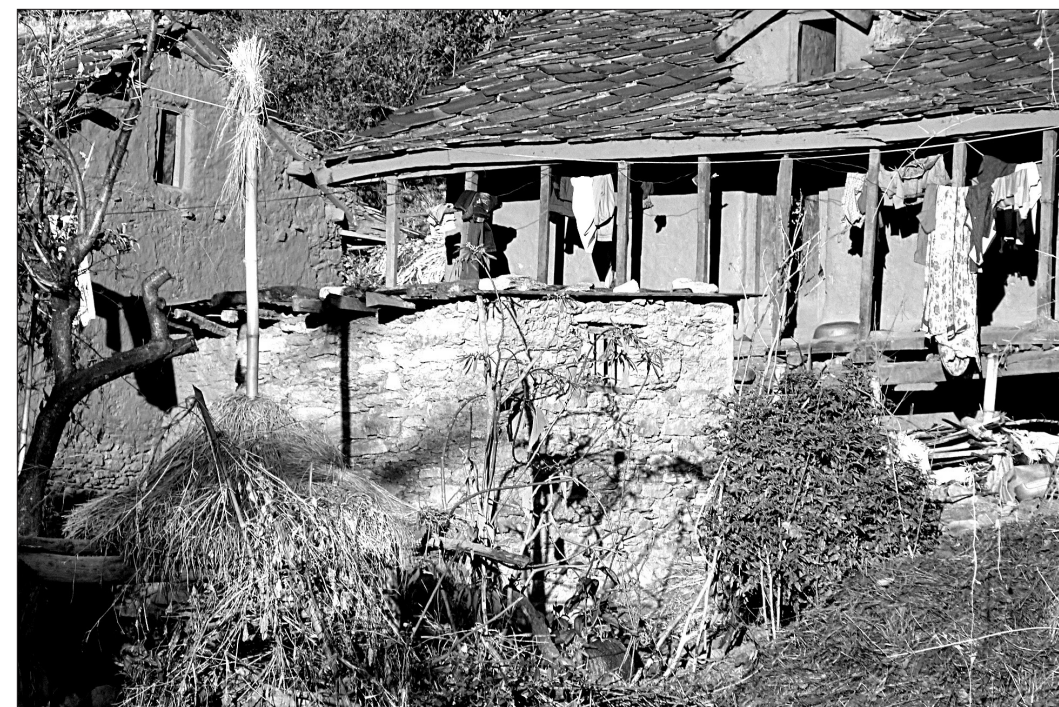
The Achham province of far western Nepal has many terraced hillsides, 3,000 to 4,000 foot hills and a backdrop of 20,000 foot snow-capped Himalayan peaks.



Children are dressed for school and head for home after a day in the classroom.



A path leads down the hill, perhaps to a favorite neighborhood restaurant, or on to other villages. Paths are the main routes of travel.



The bright sun dries laundry hung on cords stretched along the porch of a building.

(photos by Mark Lichtenstein and Cynthia West)