

DR GRAHAM'S HOMES, KALIMPONG

Friday, 9 April 2010

Warm greetings from a very warm Kalimpong. I've now been here a week and have settled in well – though you'd better ask everyone else's opinion! It has very possibly taken the best part of a week finding my feet, getting the lie of the land and adjusting to a whole new and different way of life.

And yet, one thing never changes – THE CHILDREN!

Even from the very first day, as I met them going to and coming from their classes, there would always be a polite, "Welcome Sir" or "Good morning Sir". It's still a bit strange being referred to as 'Sir' and Uncle. The cottages where the students live have house parents, who are called Uncle and Aunt. Philip and Eleanor are called Uncle and Aunt by Moses, whom they sponsor, and I think he's adopted me, as he now refers to me 'Uncle Tom'. Indeed, at the back of my Journal, I found Moses' handwriting, "Uncle Tom Rocks" – so I think I have well and truly arrived. Just the other day I thought I was back in Kelso, as a little deputation came up to me for a chat, with one of them asking, "Well Sir, what socks today?" I've also met up with Kevin and Claire, the two students KN&E sponsor, and will continue to do so.

I've never drunk so much tea and water in my puff, and I'm really enjoying the food, especially the curries – thankfully with no after- or side-effects so far!

The kids just love having their photos taken, and a great many have been taken so far – and only one week in. I'll try to send three or four each week for the website and/or for projecting on the big screen.

As you can imagine, the place is susceptible to power cuts and power surges, without any warning at all. Again, your PC system suddenly closes down without any warning at all – after which I usually mutter to myself, "oh gosh!". The telephone land line was down for several days, as was the TV. I have to say, however, that the TV is rarely on, save to watch BBC World News now and again, and of course, "Songs of Praise"!!!! And now I do know that the General Election will take place on 6 May, though I'll not be coming home to vote!

One word which is in frequent use is 'damn', though it is used in the nicest possible way, and is not frowned upon. For example, one day Moses came up to me and said, "You look damn handsome, Uncle". Shannon, sitting next to me in church on Sunday, spied my socks and quipped, "Damn nice socks, Sir". I did the address in church on Sunday, and on returning to my seat, a wee girl whispered across, "You speak so nicely, Sir", whilst another said, "Sir, you sing nice".

Later on in the day and at the start of the next week, speaking to some of the pupils, they said that Sunday's service "was fantastic – it was so entertaining – it was funny, but there was a good message in it" – and all this coming from kids.

The students are undergoing exams just now, and when you ask them how they got on, their reply (if they thought it was OK) is usually "Nice, Sir". Sometimes the day before the exam, they'll tell you that they are going to do very well – the local phrase is, "I'm going to smack the Test, Sir".

Their singing in church is just out of this world, with the acoustics also being 'damn good'! I took the Junior Assembly this morning, and the students can now sing "Halle, Halle, Halle-lujah". I'll hopefully be teaching them a number of others.

It's a school holiday today, as there is an Inter-School Girls' Basketball Tournament, and for the past week or so those students taking part have been on the practice courts at 0500 hrs! They usually get up at around 0600 hrs and begin their 'cottage chores, after which they study for an hour. Throughout the week and at weekends, they also do all their own washing and cleaning. After breakfast, they then make their way to the Katherine Graham Memorial Chapel for assembly at around 0815 hrs. Yesterday I was in with a class, who were revising for their Test – their teacher was off ill and so I tried to do bits and pieces with them – all 46 of them (two were absent!). I've offered my 'teaching services' to the Junior School (English) and to the Senior School (Accounts/Economics/Commercial), who are two teachers short at present. There is no Religious Education Department, though I've been asked by the School Secretary to help out with the Sunday School. I'll continue to take Assemblies and will be 'doing' Sunday Worship while I'm here – all of these take place in the Katherine Graham Memorial Chapel, which was built as a memorial to Dr Graham's wife.

It looks as though I'll also be invited to preach at the Macfarlane Church in Kalimpong, with a Nepalese translator being provided for me – though I think if they understood English, they'd still probably want to have an English translator present!

I've been playing football and basketball. The kids have amazing amounts of energy in this intense heat. One day we played football on a full-sized pitch – seven-a-side! It was during that game that Adrian (all four feet of him) made a crunching tackle just as I was about to score. The result was a yellow card for him and a sore ankle for me for a couple of days! I got him up at the Sunday service to help me, and as you can imagine I just had to tell the whole school about 'Naughty Adrian'! He took it in good fun. Yesterday after lunch it was around 20-a-side on the full pitch, as kids just come and join in! Although the kids know about ManU, Chelsea and even Rangers and Celtic, for some strange reason, they had never ever heard of Dunfermline Athletic! I've brought my Pars strip with me, and I'll very probably give it to 'Naughty Adrian' before I go.

I know that Philip is greatly relishing the company of his wife Eleanor, both of whom send their best wishes – and I hope that they are enjoying me being here too! Henry, the School Chaplain, had said to them of me, "I think we should keep him". So I've purchased a one-way ticket for Henry, and he should be arriving next week!!!!

I'll close now and give you another update next week – though possibly not as lengthy, and always assuming that there are no technical/connection/power problems. Once again, this log comes with my very best wishes and with much love. Again, please let everyone know at Kelso North and Ednam, and indeed in Kelso, how much I really appreciate their willingness to release me for what will no doubt be an amazing journey of faith and an even more amazing journey of life.

May God be with you till we meet again.

Tom x