

## DR GRAHAMS' HOMES KALIMPONG

Thursday, 22 April 2010

Again, greetings and God's blessings to all of you from DGH, here in Kalimpong. Last Friday the Junior Girls had a very early start, for they left at 0630 hrs for Mount Hermon School in Darjeeling to take part in a two-day Inter-School Volleyball Tournament. After Assembly, and after the Kindergarten Assembly, it was off to St Augustine's School in Kalimpong to cheer on the Junior Boys, who were taking part in the Inter-School Basketball Tournament. SAS has a school roll of just over 1,500 and is a RC School, though the RC students only account for around 10% of the school population. All students pay for their education – unlike DGH, there are no sponsored students. The boarding population is around 190 students – DGH has around 650 boarders. The girls ran out runners-up at volleyball to the host school, with the boys making it to the semi-finals, only to be beaten by the eventual winners, St Joseph's School, North Point, Darjeeling.

Power cuts continue – almost every day, and several times in the day. Last Sunday's service went well, with the Woodburn Girls singing beautifully – “God gave me eyes” and “We are marching in the light of God”. The whole church sang “He's got the whole world” – actions and all – and we finished with the rousing and ever-popular “Halle!” I'm attempting to find my way around all 21 Cottages, and on Sunday afternoon I visited three of the Boys' Cottages – Calcutta, Murray and Assam. “Sir, when is the next football match? Bring your yellow and red cards!” Martha, who is the Cottage Aunty at Assam, quipped, “Sir, I enjoyed your message very much in church today. Can you come and teach the boys some new songs? I like the new ones better than the old ones”. The theme of the Sunday service was that “we are all special”, and on leaving Murray Cottage, one of the boys (Springstein) came up and said, “Uncle, you are very special too”.

Sadly, although the sun was up there – somewhere – on Sunday, it never really came out at all.

On Monday, I took four English classes – Years 7, 8, 9 and 10, as I did on Tuesday and Wednesday. These are students, mainly Thai, who need extra tuition – and from me who can hardly speak English! At least I've learnt one Thai phrase – “Good morning!” . . . . “Aloons-a-wat” (phonetically, of course!).

I'll also be giving private tuition to a lovely Year 11 girl, Christina, who is studying another language (Mizo) and who requires some extra coaching. I now also know a little of Mizo, Bengali and Zongkha – “Tung-eh-ming?” What is your name? “Kanming-chu Tomani”. My name is Tom (Mizo); “Shubo shaka!” Good morning, Sir! (Bengali); “Kurzuzampo, laaybe!” Good morning, Sir! (Zongkha) and in Hindi, “Twoz-pintoz-Stellaz, plasso!”. Two pints of Stella, please! (only joking!).

On Friday I should have been covering for Sir Shane in the Junior School, as he'll be away with the basketball team. However, the students are not in on Friday as a strike has been called in all educational establishments in the locality. It centres around a decision to re-locate the Librarian Certificate training from Kalimpong College to Siliguri, around two/three hours away – taking things away from the hills. I'm the flavour of the month with Sir Shane as I remembered the basketball team in prayers at today's Assembly!

I've been seeing a number of students of different ages during “A Listening Ear”, with a number of them stopping me on the campus and asking for an ‘appointment’ to see me. Assemblies continue to go well, though perhaps I'm a bit biased, and the

assemblies at the Kindergarten would warm the cockles of anyone's heart. Around 170 wee ones along with their teachers are lined up in the courtyard on a sort of stage, and as soon as I go in – well, we'll not say anything to Margaret Mills our Safeguarding/Child Protection Officer – but they're all around you, jumping up, wanting hugs, cuddles and kisses . . . and getting them. The assembly only lasts around ten minutes – two or three songs, a prayer, which the kids repeat, followed by the Lord's Prayer, which we all say together – but it's all very wonderful! Today I spent the morning at the Kindergarten taking a Year 1 class: "Sir, you are so nice"; "Sir, are you staying for all periods?" I then visited the Lucia King Nursery, where the 'little cherubs' were having lunch.

Yesterday, at the end of the school day and as I was walking around the campus, two lovely girls (sisters – one Year 3 and one Year 5 – the proverbial two peas in a pod) came up and said, "Sir, we have tried 'the spoon one!'". This alludes to an assembly when my visual aid was an onion – I won't bore you with the details as to how I could connect an onion with God/Jesus! Anyway, I told them that where I come from, some people put a teaspoon in their mouth when peeling an onion to stop them crying. They had obviously gone home and tried it!

Last night, I visited the boys at Murray Cottage at 1815 hrs. They are due to sing in church on Sunday, and so I taught them "Kum ba yah" and "Give me oil in my lamp". They were wonderful, and four of them insisted on escorting me back home in the dark, as all the way home we sang the two songs – even the School Secretary heard us, and waxed lyrical to me today!

Often at dinner, I'll pop along to the Dining Room – Juniors at ground level and Seniors upstairs – and it's good to engage in conversation with them . . . "Sir, sit down here". I've been following the 'Icelandic Volcano' with interest. I'll hopefully be back on 20 May, though I'm making plans for the first-ever DGH Christingle Service, just in case I'm still here! We could quite easily do a "Service for the Blessing of Pets", as there is a large population of "dugs and their puppies" – the proverbial "Heinz 57 Varieties". On Tuesday as I was walking around the campus, a group of students came up for a chat – "Sir, when are you leaving? You don't have to leave." I told them that they way things are going with the volcano and the airspace problem, I may still be here at Christmas. "Oh, that would be so very nice, Sir."

Thunder and lightning tonight – and now doubt a few power cuts! We'll be leaving DGH tomorrow morning at around 0730 hrs to cheer on the boys in the Basketball Tournament, at least for part of the day. Things are in hand for Sunday (honestly!), when we'll all be singing (amongst other things) "We are marching in the light of God". Things are finalised for 2 May, when I'll be preaching and sharing Holy Communion at the Macfarlane Church in Kalimpong. Arrangements are being made for me to have a few days away with Philip and Eleanor to Sikkim, close to the Chinese Border around 5-8 May, and before I come home, I'm hoping to treat myself to a set of robes, as worn by the Buddhist monks – so be warned! I visited the Steel Medical Centre (Hospital) today, where there were a good number of students, of all ages. Chocolate bars were handed out, which brought large smiles to all their faces.

Just finished a wonderful Chicken Curry and Rice (an occupational hazard!). I'll now sign off and will contact you all again next week. Again, please be assured of my prayers, and although I am missing you all and Kelso very much, I hope that even in a very small way, I'm making a little difference to the little lives of all those I really have been privileged to touch.

May God be with you all, till we meet again – fairly soon!

Tom xx