

## **DR GRAHAM'S HOMES, KALIMPONG**

**Thursday, 20 May 2010**

Once again, much love and warm greetings (final greetings) from DGH.

Due to political unrest in the Kalimpong area, school was closed last Friday (14 May). Sadly, this is becoming a fairly regular occurrence, and there was also a two-day strike last Saturday and Sunday. There is talk of a 10-day 'bandh' (strike) beginning on 12 June, which is all very unsettling for the students. However, a Cottage Dance Competition was held on Friday afternoon on the basketball court. It was a highly successful and most enjoyable afternoon. The winning cottages were Thorburn (Girls) and Murray (Boys).

Saturday saw movies being shown in the Jarvie Hall. The Juniors saw the cartoon 'Open Season' at 1400 hrs, (the voice of Billy Connolly was used for one of the characters) with the Seniors catching Shakespeare's classic 'Romeo and Juliet', at 1600 hrs. The latter was filmed in America and starred Leonardo Di Caprio, and instead of horses and swords, featured cars and guns! However, the original text was not changed. Again, both films were well received.

Sunday began very hot (it had been very hot for the last four days!). On arriving at the Chapel for the service at 0930 hrs, I was informed that due to the strike and restrictions on all traffic, Mr Upassak, the Organist, would be unable to travel from town to church. To complicate matters, there was a power cut at 0920 hrs, which would mean no sound system and no power-point presentation. However, after a few silent prayers, power was restored with around two minutes to go . . . . Gratias Deo! Again, our Free Church friends would have been proud of us singing unaccompanied, and everyone did marvellously well.

It was quite emotional but I was able to keep myself in one piece. You may recall that on the Sunday before flying out we sang, 'God be with you till we meet again', in Ednam and Kelso, and so we sang it to close Sunday's service.

On Sunday afternoon I was taken for a surprise afternoon tea party hosted by the wee ones of Lucia King. You would just love them to bits! It really was a surprise and I was blindfolded all the way to make sure I had no idea where I was going! Monday saw me taking several classes, including Class 12, who were doing Home Science. Kevin, one of the students our church sponsors, was desperate to help me, and so on Sunday afternoon he came up to Jubilee House and we made Shepherd's Pie and Pavlova, which the class devoured period 7 on Monday!

I knew that the next few days were going to be difficult as I braced myself for saying the inevitable goodbyes. Over these days I received many little letters and cards from many of the students, who I think were genuine in what they said and wrote. Wednesday began with torrential rain, which lasted up until midday – was this the beginning of the monsoon rains?

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The work at the hospital is coming along nicely, and although much work has still to be done, I was invited to officially open Phase 1 of the hospital refurbishment. Hopefully we'll be able to raise additional money over Christmas so that the work can

be completed. It has been an amazing transformation, and all the kids (and nurses) have appreciated the makeover.

A plaque will be installed saying that the refurbishment took place thanks to the generosity of the people of Kelso, Scotland. I said my final farewells to the wee ones at Lucia King on Wednesday afternoon, taking them sweets and singing some songs with them. At the end of the school day on Wednesday there was a 'Fellowship Tea' for me in the Staff Room, when I also received a number of gifts from the school. The Senior Master asked me, "Well, Reverend Tom, what is your secret?" "What secret?" I asked. "Where do you get all your energy from? What makes you so happy?" If he only knew the truth!!!

The Senior Assembly on Wednesday in the Chapel was draining and very emotional, as was the Junior Assembly on Tuesday. Again, we sang 'God be with you till we meet again', and many tears were being shed during this and 'Be still, for the presence of the Lord'. As always, we finished with three rousing verses of "Halle Halle Hallelujah". I just hope that this continues when I'm gone. As one senior girl said, "Sir, that was the best ever assembly!" Another lovely comment was, "Sir, you have made the chapel come alive!"

I had decided that the only clothes I would be bringing back with me would be any clothes I had bought during my stay in Kalimpong. Consequently, my shirts, ties, shorts, trousers, shoes, boxers, jumpers etc, all went to any of the Class 12 boys who wanted them – including my two suits . . . and they grabbed the lot! During my visit to the Dining Room on Wednesday night, I received more little cards and notes. On visiting a few of the Cottages on Wednesday night, I was not allowed to walk home in the dark on my own – I had an escort of four boys from Murray House. As we chatted along the way, one said, "Uncle, when you go – no more marching in the light; no more halle, halle", whilst another piped up "No more fun!" But hopefully, there will be.

During Wednesday and at breakfast on Thursday morning, there had been little deputations appearing at Jubilee House to say their cheerios. Thursday morning included some Class 12 boys who were genuinely upset. Earlier that morning I had gone for a final walk around the campus, when there would be no students about. Before leaving I had written a final message on the campus blackboard, which everyone would see during the day. It read:

*I shall be leaving after breakfast today to begin my long journey back to Scotland. I leave with a heavy heart, but with many happy memories. Thank you all so much for sharing your lives and yourselves with me. Until we all meet again, may God bless you and watch over you. Rev Tom xx*

The homeward journey began at 0910 hrs (Kalimpong time) on Thursday and will end on Friday when I get into Newcastle Airport at 1205 hrs (BST). I'm finishing this off at Kolkata Airport, where I'm about to check in for the flight to Dubai, where I'll arrive just after midnight. You'll next hear from me and see me in Kelso. It has been an amazing experience and I can only thank all of you once again for agreeing to release me for these past seven weeks. As I said to the children, I have given them very little, but they have given me so very much, and for that and much more, I shall be eternally grateful.

Good night – and God bless!  
Tom xx