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 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 armfuls of fire wood on her head, slowly walking down the street with a smile and saying “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 once there are many ethnic nationalities, over 70 languages and several castes. We see well-dressed tourists walking to a job who knows little, 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 “halls” or some other English phrase and everyone giggles.

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 hillside have a backdrop of majestic mountains, from 3,000 to 4,000 foot hills near by 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 armfuls of fire wood on her head, slowly walking down the street with a smile and saying “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 once there are many ethnic nationalities, over 70 languages and several castes. We see well-dressed tourists walking to a job who knows little, 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.

Yesterday we walked up the hill to walk the trails that are the main routes of travel. The bright sun dries laundry hung on cords stretched along the porch of a building.

The hospital can do plain x-rays and very simple chemistry and diagnosis 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 one-lane paved. Mud and ruts abound. 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 this experience, 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 one-lane paved. Mud and ruts abound. 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.

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