

Kathmandu,  
October 2018.

Dear friends,

*"Those who know your name will trust in you,  
for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you". Ps.9.10*

For those of us who remain in Nepal throughout the summer, monsoon can be a long season. In June we welcome the cleaner air and the lush green that the rains bring, but by mid-August we long for a break in the heat and humidity and an end to the muddy roads. This year, the watching and waiting for the coolness of September brought with it an increasing awareness that October would also bring the final weeks of our temporary 'tourist visas' by which we have been able to stay in Nepal since Mark's hospital visa expired last May.

As the time drew closer, the highest levels of management at Patan Hospital spent increasing amounts of time visiting the various offices of the Health Ministry, the Labour Department, and the Department of Immigration. Repeated delays and bureaucratic hoops are nothing new in the annual process of visa renewal for most expatriates living in Nepal, but this year we faced more intransigence and uncertainty than before. With major Hindu festivals in October closing government services for an extended period, and little to show for the hours spent camped out in various offices, we began to face the possibility that we would have to leave Nepal, at least temporarily.

During this time, many of you wrote asking for updates and expressing support as you watched and prayed with us for progress. This was a great encouragement as we started to consider options about where we would exit to, how long we would be gone, and what arrangements we could make for the boys' schooling. With just two weeks left before our visas completely expired, one of which would be the Dashain festival, we began making plane and guesthouse reservations for Thailand, with the hope to return after the holidays and complete the process on the few remaining days of our visa.

The director of Patan Hospital is not unfamiliar with visa hassles. His own son, a school 'topper', this year was recognised for a significant scholarship to a new and innovative college in the US. Despite having previously spent time in Japan and Australia, and gathering the extensive amount of documentation required, his repeated applications to the US embassy for a study visa were denied. The reason given: "You're too good a student; why didn't you apply to Harvard or Yale?" He is now taking an enforced year off while he considers his options for next year. Worldwide it is a difficult time for those seeking to live outside their birth country, no matter what the reason.

As our deadline approached, the hospital director (this student's father) phoned Mark repeatedly from various government offices, requesting that we not complete our travel reservations as he inched towards the necessary approval letters. We postponed our decision by 24 hours, and then by another 24 hours, and then another, telling friends repeatedly "By this time tomorrow we will know for sure". Finally, two days before the holiday started, the labour department issued the all-essential work permit which would allow us to receive a new visa...but instead of the usual full year, the permit was for a mere 6 weeks while the hospital was to process more documentation. It was a disappointment, but would at least buy us a little more time.

Throughout this period, no doubt supported by many prayers, Mark and I felt quite at peace that God would work things out as He intended, but we could see tension building in the boys at the prospect of sudden change. Both boys have spent their whole lives in Nepal, and Zachary has just worked through the move to a new school for his A-levels after 11 years with the same group of classmates at his old school. We even considered granting temporary guardianship of the boys to friends, which

would allow them to stay in Nepal on student visas while Mark and I departed. So it was relief for us all to know an imminent departure was cancelled.

When Mark visited the Immigration Department for the final step of receiving visas, he was amazed to hear that, despite the 6 week work permit, we might be granted a 3 year visa based on a new reciprocal agreement between Nepal and the US. We have been in Nepal long enough to know that such arrangements are not always as straight forward as they might first seem...and they weren't. I have always lived in Nepal on my Irish passport, and nobody from Nepali officials to US consular staff knew how to deal with a "dual-citizen", especially one who had the temerity to not use her US passport for entry into Nepal. With 3 days left on our visas, senior immigration officials called a meeting to discuss my case: could they transfer documentation between my two passports, or was I going to be required to leave Nepal after all in order to officially re-enter on my US passport? After much toing and froing, including a minor mutiny by junior officials who don't like new ideas, the director general finally declared that enough was enough: for the grand fee of \$2 they would transfer my documentation and proceed. With 48 hours left on our old visas, on October 24<sup>th</sup>, three years of 'non-tourist' visa were stamped into each of our (American) passports.

It is a beautiful time of year here in Nepal. The monsoon heat and humidity have pulled back, westerly breezes have cleared the skies and the Himalayan peaks have reappeared along the horizon. Each day, I drink my morning tea in a quiet corner on our roof. The warm sunshine, extravagant yellow blooms on a nearby tree and joyous birdsong speak more of spring than the approaching winter chill. The air itself seems bright. Even as we are still absorbing the fact that we are free of visa hassles for the next three years, many Nepali friends and colleagues have expressed their delight that we are able to remain. We certainly feel privileged to be the recipients of such love and grace from so many quarters.

With much appreciation for the part many of your prayers played in this, sincerely,

Deirdre, Mark, Zachary and Benjamin.