

A Day in the Life of a Nepali Family

By Peggy Wollaston
Chester County IFYE

The sun has not yet pushed itself over the horizon when a new day begins in the Nepali family.

All members of the family — from the oldest to the very youngest — rise at 5:30 or 6 a.m. The sound of the water bucket against the side of the well signals the start of the day's labors.

My present host family is fortunate in that their well is situated only a few feet from their home. However, this is also the source of water for several of the neighboring families as well.

While the women of the family prepare the fire with cow dung chips to cook the first meal of the day, the men will take an invigorating bath about the well.

At 9 a.m. "lunch" is eaten. This meal consists of rice, potatoes, beans, "chapatis" which are paper thin like pancakes, and tea. Nepali food is characteristically "pero" or very hot (in seasonings). I am fortunate that my family realizes my sensitive palate and gives me small portion of the "pero" foods "first to taste".

Carbohydrates comprise the main diet of the Nepali. However, the only sweet item is the "cheene" or sugar used in the tea.

Meat is only served occasionally in the form of goat or chicken. Both, I have found tasty, but very hard to chew. Beef is not eaten, as cows are sacred in the Hindu religion.

The men of the family are served first, followed by the women. I being a guest am served last. My meals are eaten in my room as the Hindu religion forbids anyone of a different religion of caste from eating or even entering the kitchen area.

Miss Peggy Wollaston, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Wollaston of Toughkenamon, is spending six months in Nepal with several different families under the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE) program. This is her first report on the experience.

Miss Wollaston's farm background, her 10 active years in Chester County 4-H, her experiences as an Extension home economist, her close association with other foreign exchange programs, and her active participation in church, school, and community activities give her a broad background of experiences to share with her friends in Nepal.

Following the meal, Father will gather about him his prayer book, prayer beads, a few fresh flowers, and with incense burning he will read in a chant from his well-worn prayer book. This usually lasts for 45 minutes during which time the remainder of the family goes about their business. Father may even be interrupted during this time to answer a question

or two from other family members.

The work of the day begins in earnest after the first meal. The women busy themselves with various household tasks. Washing clothes with a hard soap and briskly applied "elbow grease" is a common sight about the well, as are the clothes laid on bushes or fences to dry in the fresh air and sunshine. Sweeping the house and yard is done with a broom of dried reeds about one foot in length — quite a back-bending task. Grass, grain, and vegetables are laid on braided mats to dry in the morning sun. Cow dung shaped into patties 6-8 inches in diameter to be later used as fuel are neatly placed in rows on the sides of houses and walls.

One or two family members will take the livestock to graze along the road banks. Often, this is the responsibility of young children.

The father works in the family's small vegetable garden and at planting and harvesting time he is in his rice paddy. The family grows food only for its own use as this is usually all the land which it owns. My host family owns about 2½ acres which is more than the average



Miss Peggy Wollaston
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bread, and tea is served; again, capitalizing on the carbohydrates!

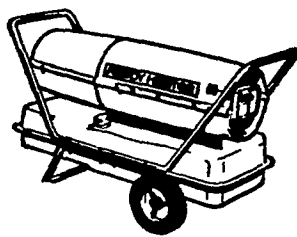
The day's labors are continued after this brief interval, and at 5:30 when dusk is closing in, the kerosene lamps are lit and the fire begun for the evening meal, eaten at 8 p.m.

The livestock are brought home and fed, and the cattle milked. One cow produces for 2-4 pounds of milk daily. The small animals are brought into the house and tied in the half of the first floor not occupied by the kitchen area.

The last meal of the day is of the same nature as the first, and always a large portion of rice is eaten. This is dipped by small amount in a liquid of vegetable juices and spices, rolled in a ball, scooped up and popped into the mouth. This is quite a technique, as the food should not go beyond the second knuckles of the hand.

Quiet conversation is heard about the fire for a short duration before retiring for the evening. As the moon and stars shine brightly down on their paddy, garden, and home, the Nepali family has culminated another day's labors.

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