are supposed to feed all sädhus.

After this intriguing interlude, the two students ushered us into the grounds of a partly constructed Buddhist monastery. Here, fathers and sons carved intricate designs in wood for the ornate parts of the buildings; the old practice of father teaching son his craft lived on.

The students walked us back to the trolley stop. We thanked them for giving us a tour of the village and they thanked us for letting them practice their English. During our walk with these young men, they occasionally held hands. (This was a practice we would see at times throughout Asia.)

On our way back to Katmandu, we learned of the other group's outing. At the top of the hill, the natives had tied the goat to a stake near a shrine and beheaded it. With its death, they shouted wildly to the beat of drums hoping that this sacrifice would appease bloodthirsty Kali, another name for Shakti, personified as the destroyer Shiva's wife.

Since coming to Katmandu, our fast walk had slowed to a lazy stroll like that of the natives, and the urgency of life as we had known it had disappeared. We seemed to have traveled back in time, especially now that we had seen this old village with few people and no cars as well as a blood sacrifice.

That evening our whole group, including Jen, set out on foot to visit a Christian orphanage. Robert, having made the arrangements, led us through a nice residential area. Although the streets were dusty, we came upon a neighborhood of attractive

modern homes belonging, we imagined, to foreign diplomats. After taking a few wrong turns and retracing our steps, we found the orphanage.

Constructed of concrete block, this two-story home was also in need of paint and repairs. At the door we were greeted by happy children ranging in age from infants to sixteen years. These children had either been abandoned on the streets of Katmandu or left on the doorsteps of the orphanage. They appeared to be well cared for, and were probably receiving a better education than the other local children. The clean but modest home was run by a middle-aged American lady from Chicago and her Nepalese husband.

We were escorted to a balcony where we sat on wooden folding chairs while these dark wide-eyed youngsters served us sandwiches and lemonade. Next they sang Christian songs with great enthusiasm, accompanied by one of the older girls on her guitar. Our guitarists joined in and soon we were all singing. Strong feelings of love and friendship were exchanged with these children who had captured our hearts.

Katmandu
Thursday, March 4

This would be our last day in Katmandu. After breakfast, Jen and I, on rented bicycles, peddled to the outskirts of a residential district to look for a complex of shrines and temples consecrated to monkeys. In Nepal, the monkey is sacred and its

freedom and protection are insured by the Hindu belief that Hanuman, the monkey god, is Rama's chief helper, Rama being an incarnation of the preserver Vishnu.

Seeing the complex atop a hill, we parked our bikes and started up the steps. A young boy stopped us and offered to guard our bikes for a fee, but we declined. Ascending the hill, I had second thoughts: would the boy steal the bikes? But then we encountered two turbaned fortune tellers who asked to tell our fortunes for a "very good price." Jen accepted their offer but fifteen minutes later and fifty rupees poorer, she regretfully informed me that she had learned nothing from the experience.

Monkeys, natives and some tourists wandered about the shrines and temples. Two snarling dogs caused us some concern. At one shrine a group of Hindus hovered around a fire heating two bowls of bright colored dye used to mark the forehead of each Hindu participating in the ritual. The colored marks identified the Hindu sect to which they belonged.

The grounds were littered with monkey and dog excrement. The odor from this, mixed with the smell of burning incense, was sickening. The dogs began fighting and some monkeys looked as if they might attack. The oppressive atmosphere and Jen's discovery of what she thought was a louse in her hair made us decide to leave promptly, but not before a lame beggar woman in rags approached us pleading for <u>baksheesh</u>. Heeding Neil's warning, we did not stop.

We were relieved to see that our bikes were still at the bottom of the hill. Biking to the center of town, we lunched at Aunt Jane's, a restaurant owned and managed by Americans. It was a popular place for Himalayan trekkers. I treated myself to roast lamb and the trimmings, apple pie a la mode and a cup of very good coffee. Although the food was great, the memory of the beggar woman lingered. Should I have given her something despite the warning?

Before returning to the hotel, we peddled to the post office. As I waited for Jen outside, I noticed an unattended barefoot toddler in a soiled red dress. She sat contentedly on the steps of a small shrine watching life in the city pass by. What did the future hold for her? Would she be fortunate to marry, have a family and live to the ripe old age of forty-three? She probably would not be a candidate for Kumari, a living goddess, as I had seen another small child in a postcard portrayed. I snapped her photo which left me with my final impression of Katmandu.

Katmandu to Birganj
Friday, March 5

This was the day we had all been waiting for, the start of the overland trek. We were up at 5:15 A.M., breakfasted at 6:15, and were loading our cases on the roof of a small Nepalese bus at 6:50. This early morning start would set a precedent for most of our future departures. Sadly, Jen awakened very ill. Perhaps our bike ride had been too much for her.

The day was beautifully clear but cool. We would need parkas and sweaters. Again we were packed in like sardines, holding much of our hand luggage in our laps. Neil and Graeme were to fly ahead and meet us with the Sundowners' bus in Birganj.

A tall handsome turbaned Sikh was our driver. Neil had cautioned us to be on our best behavior during the trip for it would be very dangerous driving through the Himalayan foothills. Anyone who complained to the driver might cause him to tease us by driving carelessly. With this warning in mind, most of us prayed.

The paved road out of Katmandu soon turned into a wide one-lane gravel road with potholes. As in Australia, we were driving on the left side of the road; the driver's seat was on the right. (We would drive on the left side through India and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, we would change to the right side until we reached England where we would reverse again.)

Hairpin turns at thousand foot drops and the narrow road lent much suspense to the day's journey. We averaged twenty MPH. There was barely room for vehicles traveling in either direction to safely pass each other. When oncoming vehicles were sighted, our driver slowed down, hugged the mountainside, sometimes stopping and sometimes getting out to direct the traffic to keep it from sliding over the edge.

A number of Nepalese and Indian trucks, some loaded with passengers, were trimmed in brass, silver and gold with leis of fresh flowers on the hoods. Usually there was a lei dangling from the

rear view mirror inside the cab. "Use Horn Please" was printed in bold English letters on the backs of many of these vehicles, for on this winding road drivers relied heavily on sounding horns.

We would have taken pictures of these trucks, but, due to national security, that was prohibited. Throughout Asia, in addition to trucks, we would not be allowed to photograph trains, bridges, military installations or border crossings.

In spite of danger lurking at every turn, we found the scenery breathtaking, mile after mile of terraced fields on the Himalayan slopes. Some women slowly carried buckets of water to irrigate these fields, and others walked barefoot up the gravel road bearing heavy loads of firewood supported by broad headbands.

We stopped at the Mt. Everest Lookout Lodge for lunch. The lodge was closed, but we used the picnic tables and benches below it. Several of us had taken leftover bread and hard boiled eggs from the breakfast table to add to our lunch. As we ate, we looked upon an Everest engulfed in clouds. What a disappointment!

After eating, it was time to locate our first bush loos. The girls ventured out in one direction and the fellows in the other searching for secluded spots in bushes, ditches or tall weeds. At first we were very modest, but seasoned by travel we would no doubt become less inhibited at least among ourselves.

The winding bumpy road had worsened Jen's illness. She had been sitting next to me in the middle of the bus, but after lunch traded seats with Kathy who had a roomy front seat next to an

open window. There Jen sat with her head out the window vomiting and inhaling fresh air. In retrospect, it was a funny sight, but at the time no laughing matter. The rest of the group seemed to be holding their own.

Loving levelheaded brown-haired brown-eyed Kathy had been my faithful correspondent before the trip. But only now did we have the opportunity to talk in depth. To a degree, I was shy and found Jen enough company. I was the type of person to observe groups rather than to participate. Thus, it was not unusual that Kathy's and my getting together had taken this long. Being teachers and of the same faith, we had much to chat about. In time our conversation gave way to sleep, as we used our CYTA bags for headrests.

After nine hours on the road, we were out of the Himalayas and had entered Birganj. The main road was so dusty that, with its use by the multitudes, dust rose like a dense brown fog. Through this limited visibility, we could barely see the outlines of buildings as we moved slowly between people on foot and in wooden carts and buggies pulled by oxen and water buffaloes.

We turned into the drive of our hotel, another drab two-story concrete structure. Oleanders, shrubs and weeds surrounded it haphazardly, but, there parked in front was our spanking clean modern bus.

Neil and Graeme greeted us looking relaxed and rested. Their flight had taken a mere hour. Robert and Neil coordinated our room assignments as we helped the bus detail unload. We waved

goodbye to our Sikh driver as he drove off. Contrary to our expectations, he had proven to be very considerate and capable.

I would be rooming with Kathy, Elizabeth and Myra, all teachers. Our room was behind the dining room. It consisted of four beds, two large ceiling fans on either side of a bare light bulb and a tiny bathroom.

The bathroom sink faced the handleless door and a standard toilet was crammed next to it. The shower spigot was in the center of the ceiling. We tried the shower which sprayed the entire room for thirty seconds, then the water pressure dwindled to drops. To add to the innovative plumbing arrangement, the sink's drainpipe ended an inch above the floor, sending the used water toward a small hole in the corner of the room where it ended its course beneath the hotel.

Neil came to our room to tell us to turn the ceiling fans on to combat the mosquitoes. Elizabeth's contribution of mosquito incense repellent, my 6-12 and the help of fast moving lizards on the walls and ceiling were other deterrents.

My bed had no sheets and only a dirty mattress and blanket under which I found a bug. I would use my sleeping bag tonight.

Still daylight, my roommates and I headed outdoors for a walk before dinner. We had already forgotten the forbidding dust. Even though we wore scarves around our noses and mouths, the dust was still unbearable, so I looked in on Jen instead. She was still very sick and would not be down to eat. Her room was worse than ours, more crowded and less private.

Dinner was served buffet style in the dining room. A couple of lizards watched from walls as we enjoyed fried chicken, roast potatoes, vegetables and canned fruits. Except for tea, beverages were extra. The food was so tasty that most of us went back for seconds. As Neil was well acquainted with Asian customs and available foods, he would be ordering the meals each evening until we began camping.

My sponge bath with cold water was less than satisfactory, perhaps tomorrow's hotel would have better accommodations. I brushed my teeth using the sterilized water from my thermos. Before slipping into my sleeping bag, I checked it to make sure it was free of bugs and lizards. So this was life on the road. Extraordinary!