

FEATURE

On a journey...



Jamyang working on leveling the floor in Alexi's bedroom, Shanti Bhawan, Kullu-Manali valley, India

After some weeks of this gruesome daily and nightly routine, I am exhausted beyond imagination! So when Jamyang is feeling a bit better and can finally lie straight again, he decides to sleep on the bed in his puja room so that I, alone in our bedroom, can get some rest at night. This is not because we don't want to sleep together, but due to having not slept properly now for weeks and his still insistent coughing keeping me up, I can hardly get through the day where there's a lot of hard physical work to do regarding the household jobs, not to mention the tension of him being ill. Jamyang also finally needs to get some good rest and sleeping alone means no disturbance from me either. Around this time, Alexi finishes her exams and turns her attention to continuing to decorate her bedroom. As Jamyang gets better, in short stints he's able to patch up the places where the wood has deteriorated, while Alexi gets on with painting the walls and ceiling with a cream colour and window frames in light blue. Then having ordered a number of cement bags to be brought up to the house by a couple of Nepalis, Jamyang himself levels the part of the floor that's slightly sunken, doing a little bit everyday as his energy increases.

Ironically, one night while sitting around the fire at dinner, Jamyang mentions that we are only missing one thing now, meaning Samuel! Then it's on Christmas Eve that I learn that Samuel had bought a ticket to come to India on the early morning of the 23rd and would have been arriving here at the airport in Bhuntar today, to make a Christmas surprise for us! Alexi has been in on the plan and was going to make an excuse to go somewhere and actually go to pick him up. However, having booked his tickets the week beforehand, the UK government had suddenly imposed a restriction on anyone leaving the country after the 22nd December, stopping flights from departing because of the

huge surge of Coronavirus cases in the UK. His flight was due to leave after midnight and because of this new regulation, he hadn't even gone to the airport, as people were being fined for trying to leave the country without a valid reason. As usual, the rules and regulations around Coronavirus come up very quickly and without much warning and are always accompanied by a load of uncertainty and it was only during the following week that he'd discovered that the airline had pulled the flight departure time forward to before midnight for his flight and he could have actually taken it! When I hear about this, it really touches me and I am upset, feeling sorry during the whole day after learning about the potential surprise. We don't really bother celebrating Christmas per se, but we do however, make the first of several trips to a shop in Patlikuhl down on the other side of the valley from us, which is open today, to order a new mattress for Alexi's bed. It has to be specially



Alexi painting her bedroom, Shanti Bhawan, Kullu-Manali valley, India

made, as its dimensions are slightly different to standard ones. This is something that started in Nepal, where in the house we were renting next to the Bouddhanath stupa for the last 2 years of our stay there, the wooden frame of the bed they'd provided had these particular proportions and I'd bought a mattress to fit it. That mattress then came with us to India and we had the base of a bed made to fit it here. Jamyang and I had then replaced that mattress with another and given the older one to Alexi, making a new bed base with these same proportions. Alexi now wants to replace this old mattress and we are firmly fixed in a cycle of now accommodating 2 beds made to this odd size of both base and mattress that does not fit any standard model! Despite continuing to manage the household jobs, in spare moments during the day, I'm now starting to get a few hours of free time and get down to thinking about Ian's request for the synopsis of the Tibetan Book of the Dead installation and information about my sacred geometrical Photo Collage Art pictures. First of all, I pull out some of the work I've already done on the Tibetan Book of the Dead, and see how I can modify this into something that could be suitable for an exhibition of the type that Ian is talking about. I then make a separate file with information about my photo collage art pieces. There are pages and pages of information that I've already thrown down at an earlier date for an exhibition concept, but now that I have something constructive to work towards, I can give it a much more wholesome shape and get into editing and modifying the 2 texts that are already there. It is, however, when I start focusing on the one for the Photo Collage Art section that somehow this and the other on the Tibetan Book of the Dead, start to merge. I am suddenly laying out a whole new design that incorporates all 8 pieces of my photo collage art and the Circle of Immortality art piece that I've made since 2005, calling it 'The Magician's Jewel'. This is most unexpected! It's literally appearing out of nowhere and I just get on with doing what I can, when I can, in between cooking and shopping and everything else, which actually turns out to be the methodology I need in this case, helping me to ground myself in between sessions. Beginning with its shell and working inwards, I develop and write down the concepts of each as I go, first an outer, inner, secret and then heart essence layer, lit-

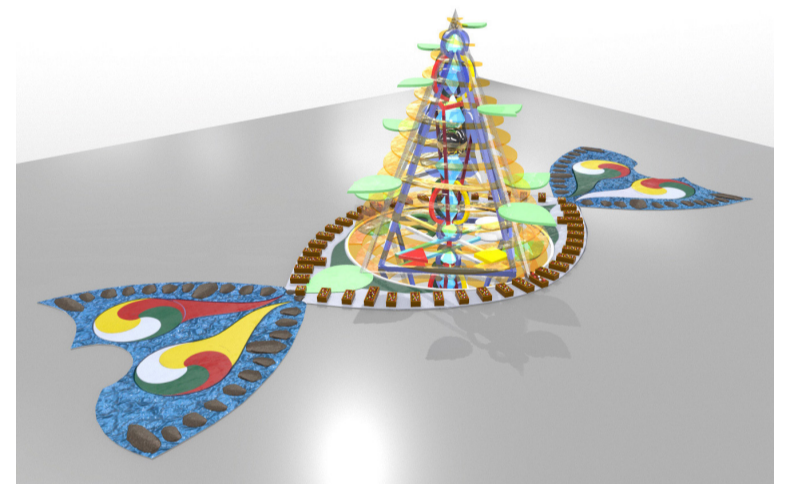
erally falling into place like a dream. It is becoming so complex that I can no longer rationalize what I am really doing, but decide to just roll with the flow of it and allow what comes, to come. It's difficult to conceive of it as a whole right now, but as I work at each section of it step by step, filling out the meanings as I go, with the knowledge that Ian needs this by the middle of January, I am pushed to complete it. Then as it's going to be really difficult to understand its meaning without some pictorial representation, I also get some designs of detailed sections of it done with Frank.

Jamyang's strength increases week by week and he's now gaining enough energy to be able to start walking down to the line of shops in the village below our house with me daily when I'm doing the shopping, just to get some exercise and build up his muscles. But the smoke coming out of the chimneys of each of the homes in the village is a lot for him to bear still and he has to stop many times to catch his breath along the way. Then to mark the end of this period of time of difficulties pouring over our house one day, Nala, the kitten that had been brought to us for safe-keeping by the boys from the village, goes missing. She's still not back by



Bringing the items back from the shop in Patlikuhl for renovating Alexi's room, Kullu-Manali valley, India

energy with their own deaths. Once the concrete has settled on the floor of Alexi's room, she purchases a new royal blue carpet with under foam for it that Jamyang sticks down, plus new curtains from the same shop in Patlikuhl. Samuel's old room is currently haphazardly storing many of the items from Alexi's room while it's being renovated and as they return to her room, we then take out the old carpet from there, thoroughly sweep and wipe down



First version of "The Magician's Jewel" as a computer generated image

nightfall, which is extremely unusual and we suspect the worst. The next morning, Alexi goes searching for her and finds her dead by a tree down near the water channel, obviously killed by a dog. I am deeply saddened by this, as she has been a little bundle of delight throughout this harsh period we've just been through. We'd tried to save her from the dogs who had got her siblings in the village by having her live with us here, but perhaps she was never meant to survive and there's no way we can cheat death, even if we were giving her a level of protection she would never have had in the village. Rounding off this stretch of troubled times is now the death of our youngest cat that had started with the death of our eldest, Dumbu and I remember how time and again I've seen how our cats intervene to divert bad things away from us, carrying away the negative

the floor and now cover it with the better parts of the old green carpet from Alexi's room that we'd bought to cover the floor when we first came here in 2010. Jamyang also cuts away the frayed parts of Samuel's old carpet and washes it to use elsewhere. Then we start a big sorting out of things in Samuel's old cupboard, as well as the household linen that are stored on a large bamboo cabinet of shelves in there, going through each item and putting them back neatly into piles of double sheets, single sheets, pillow cases, cushion covers and older cloth pieces to use for the cats, as well as spare cloth for things we may need to make things from in the future.

To be continued...

For all previous editions of Susan's story, 'On a Journey...', please go to: www.pyramidkey.com/readsusansarticleshere/