

On a journey...

Now that I'm free from working on 'The Magician's Jewel' for a while, in fact to be honest, simply unable to continue working on it, I focus on sorting out things in the house that I've been putting off for the last few months while I've been juggling managing the daily chores and writing 'The Magician's Jewel'. After clearing out a part of the cupboard in Samuel's old room downstairs, which is now being called, 'The Green Room', as the old green carpet from Alexi's room is now down on the floor in there, my office has accumulated piles of books and old files that now need housing! After making several long shelves a couple of years ago that run along the two sides of the whole of one end of my office, I now need the same at the opposite end of the room. For this, Jamyang buys some plywood, cuts it up to size, then paints it and finishes it off by nailing some thinly designed wooden strips to border the edges, as he'd done with the earlier ones he made. Now my room is almost fully skirted by low shelves under the eaves of the sloping down roof that I fill with what I can, also decanting the contents of several old bamboo shelves that we'd bought from Mussoorie into them, that I now want to put into the spare room, so that when we have guests they'll be able to unload the items from their cases onto these shelves.

At this same time, I remove a wobbly square table that Jamyang had made earlier and put in the attic when we always used to drink our afternoon tea in there. I ask him to add some support underneath its flat top and base, then remove it from my office, now putting it into my puja room, which gets the late morning and afternoon sun, which'll be beneficial for the plants that we bought at the nursery after I arrived at the airport in Kullu on my return from the UK



On the balcony at Sonali's other house, Katrain, Kullu-Manali valley, India

last year and others that have been transposed into bigger pots, one of which is a geranium that is now planted inside the plastic exterior of our old toaster that Alexi has painted! The other thing that brings a lot of renewed enjoyment these days is going to the hot springs nearby at Kalath for the first time in 10 months, as apparently the situation here is getting much better now and the government is declaring that Covid is overall retreating into the shadows and that India is getting free of the disease. On one occasion, we invite Sonali, Ekta and Rudra to come with us, because even though they live closer to the baths than us, they've never been, so it's a new experience for all of them!

A few days after, Sonali invites us over to her house for the day. After lunch, we creep off for a while to bake a cake in the kitchen and then at tea, eat it in honour of Jamyang's Tibetan birthday, which all Tibetans celebrate around the time of 'Losar', the Tibetan New Year. It's a fun and relaxing day, sitting around chatting along with Ekta and an intern fellow she's got staying there these days, who's a radio jockey from Dehra Dun coming to do some art work for her institute. Sonali then takes us to see a small house she's renting and cur-

rently renovating on the same property, to house people who come to work with the institute. We then joke around on the balcony there, taking silly photos. After tea, we watch the movie I made about my journey with Alexi and Samuel to Maratika in January 2007. I'm seeing it again after a very long time and am so very glad that I've documented these special moments of the children's lives into this properly edited movie, 'Journey to Maratika'. Just after arriving to our new home in Mussoorie, India, I remember interviewing the kids about the trip for the movie, something that they were not so keen on doing at the time, that I'd nevertheless made them do. I then used relevant sections of the interview in between videoed sections of the children at different parts of the journey, so that their perspectives form the main thread of the story. These are magical moments that cannot be brought back, but can be replayed through the movie.

Sonali and Rudra then come to stay with us again, but alone this time, as Ekta is visiting other friends in Manali. Alexi is also out staying with friends who live in the Soil valley, an inlet from the main Kullu-Manali valley that's within walking distance from here. Again having stayed 1 night with us, Rudra persuades Sonali to stay another, as he loves playing with our cats and being in a different place for a couple of days is like having a holiday! It's on the second evening when we're sitting around the fire that there's a knock at the door. It's already dark and I'm shocked to see Alexi standing there, as I was not expecting her back today. I then see that she's in tears and my mind immediately wanders to all sorts of tragedies that could have befallen her. I immediately ask her what is going on and she tells me she's just found out an hour ago that one of her closest friends, Rigzin, a young fellow who she was living with in the same apartment in Kathmandu and who was also studying in the same college as her, has suddenly died this morning, or sometime during the night. She'd been speaking to him last night up until 11pm and he'd been fine then, but other friends in the apartment had found him dead in his bed this morning. Later they discover that he'd had an epileptic fit, a condition that had just started a couple of years ago since he'd entered his twenties.

Alexi wants to go to Kathmandu for his funeral and I understand her wishes to do so, but it's not as

straightforward as it used to be. The border between India and Nepal is now open, but she'll have to apply for a visa at the Nepalese Embassy in Delhi before going. We look it up, but it's nearly impossible to get information on how long this will take through the Internet and the Embassy is not calling her back. Rigzin's parents fly into Kathmandu from India the next day. His father is a diplomat with the Indian foreign office and had been stationed in Kathmandu until October last year, after which he'd been posted to a remote region of N.E. India. Alexi then learns that Rigzin's parents have decided he'll be cremated the next day, so going to Kathmandu is not a priority anymore and she cancels the idea of going there, now entering a period of grief, busying herself with meeting friends around the valley here. Temporarily stopping attending her online classes, she eventually picks them up a few weeks later, which is possible because the classes are now fully online and all recorded. Now in the last term of her Bachelor's Degree, she luckily has less classes this semester, as she did an extra Sanskrit course over her last summer holidays for which she's already gained the credits.

Jamyang's aunt calls him to tell him about Rizdin's death. We'd always known that Jamyang had some connection with him, but had not investigated the connection so thoroughly, thinking he was just a member of the same community from their same area. But now we also discover that he was actually quite a close relation of Jamyang's, a second cousin, as Rigzin's mother is the daughter of one of Jamyang's aunts.



Sitting around chatting at Sonali's house, Katrain, Kullu-Manali valley, India

Since the Tibetan New Year has now passed, according to their astrology, it's now my 'black year' that comes around every 12 years in the Tibetan calendar. I look back over the other 'black years' of my life and indeed see that both life-changing and traumatic events happened in all of them. During the first at age 12, my father died, then at age 24, the business I'd created with the children's father collapsed along with our relationship, which we'd tried to repair, but within a couple

of years was unresolvedly finished. My last black year at 36 had proven to come prominently the year before while I was 35 and now I'm waiting to see if this year, my 48th, will be difficult, or whether the difficulties already came last year with the death of Christopher and the subsequent



Losar Tashi Delek, Happy New Ox Metal Year!

Jamyang making tea and Kabse in the "Happy New Tibetan Year" picture Susan sends out, Shanti Bhawan, Kullu-Manali valley, India

headache with his will that is actually continuing into this new Tibetan year too.

Because I know it's a negative year, I'm already on standby, which in a sense makes me more aware of the decisions I'm making. Despite wishes to travel, I get the sense that I should just stay at home and do a meditation retreat or something, because an accident may be on the cards. I am fully aware that this could just be a projection of fear at 'knowing' that it's a black year for me,

the strength of which depends on whether I believe I'm really guiding my own reality, which I'd certainly like to believe and that because all potential exists out there, I can consciously steer myself along pathways where I am safe from harm, in this way nullifying the one that contains an accident.

To be continued...

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



Jamyang feeding Susan the first piece of his birthday cake, Katrain, Kullu-Manali valley, India