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Dear Friends,

As many of you know I planned a trip to visit Spiti this winter. The idea was to join Dr Laji, work with him holding clinics in the hospital, and to learn what it was like to live at 30 degrees below zero.

Well, my journey didn't quite work out as planned but I'd like to share my experiences with you. Having overcome the obstacles of getting a Spiti permit I was all set to leave for Delhi on 5<sup>th</sup> February.

On my return from a tour in South India on 1<sup>st</sup> February I received a letter from Laji to say that he had left Spiti. After spending 7–10 days in Kaja, Laji had suffered from altitude sickness which developed into pulmonary oedema. He seriously thought he might die and should get out as fast as possible. He took a taxi to Tabu and felt better, so stayed there for a while, but the problem returned and Laji finally decided to join his wife and children in Delhi.

Laji invited me in his letter to join him in Manali. As I had £100 to deliver, collected from the sale of the Christmas cards thanks to your help, and many other things to discuss regards the doctors trip in June, I decided to go.

The journey to Manali was an adventure in itself, my flight to Kulu was cancelled due to a snow storm. I travelled by road with two Indian business men who were also meant to be on the flight. Time was getting on, we did a James Bond drive up the highway to Chandigarh; fortunately I was used to the Indian way of driving! Our target was to reach Mandi that night, but suddenly we hit the storm; thunder, lightning, torrential rain, no condition for James Bond to be driving. We decided to stay the night at a government rest house at Roper. I was the only woman, so bolted and barred my room – gosh it was freezing.

The next day the sun shone and we had the most glorious drive up the Kulu valley, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. On arrival in Manali I went straight to the Hospital to find Laji, having telephoned him the day before to tell him of my ETA. He jokingly said he couldn't offer me anywhere to stay but would see me around! Next I went to John Banon, he couldn't offer me a bed either as he had drained his pipes and dismissed his staff for the winter. Finally I went to the Mayflower Hotel which was open but empty. They offered me a room at the full rate, by now it was cold and dark so I took it gratefully.

Laji joined me for lunch the next day and we had a good chat about everything.

THE HOSPITAL; Things have moved on since last August. The ground floor of the hospital is now complete thanks to the hard work of the local people and the organisation from Jeet. Laji stayed at the hospital and held clinics in the mornings. In the afternoons he set up a hygiene program. The children came voluntarily to have their hair washed, nails cut and a lesson on how to clean their teeth. As the news spread, up to 25 were coming per day.

I enclose the plans to complete the hospital. We need to raise another £3,000 to complete the building, if possible by June when I visit again with the doctors.

The ground floor will consist of a consulting room, treatment room, store room, (for dry goods dressings etc.) kitchen, living room for patients, a terrace to sit out for meals etc.

Top floor will consist of 2 bedrooms for medical staff or tourists, to bring in some revenue. Greenhouse to grow tomatoes cucumbers etc. as the sunlight is so strong.

HEALTH CARE PROGRAMME; When Laji came out of Spiti in December he invited the teenagers, 12-18 year olds, to come to Manali to learn about basic health care and first aid. 14 young people came. They lived in the school in Manali as they too were on their long winter school holiday.

Morning session was to learn;  
English and Hygiene given by trained health care workers from the west, the one I met was a lovely American girl.

Afternoon session, given by Laji, was to learn basic first aid. We had such fun teaching them to bandage limbs!

The Spiti children left to go home the same day as I did. I am sure the news of their adventures will spread like wild-fire in the valley, and they will be queueing up to come next year.

THE FUTURE PLAN IS; to set up a winter programme in Manali for the children of Spiti to attend in their long winter vacation. They will be able to use the facilities of the Manali school.

FURTHER FUTURE PLAN IS; to offer a full training program in Spiti in winter when the school is closed. It will include weaving, typing, dress making and woodwork. This will teach the young people a skill, so they can make something of their lives and not end up as stone cutters on the roads, which inevitably leads to drug abuse.

I asked Laji about the plans to help Jeet. Laji is looking into fertility clinics in India. There is one in Delhi, but it has no record of positive results. There is one in Bombay with a 20% success rate but the techniques used are old fashioned. There is a possibility they could come to England. Laji can arrange for them to have free treatment and stay in a friends house. The only cost would be the travelling expenses. Both Jeet and his wife are currently applying for passports. Jeet is reluctant to leave until the hospital is complete. This is why I am anxious to pull out all the stops to

raise the money as soon as possible. (The kitty has £400 at the moment, all donations which have come in since my return from India).

The new library at the Manali school is now built. The next challenge is that it needs to be equipped with books! Laji has a system all worked out whereby books can be sent direct from the UK. Any books for the young on all subjects from Enid Blyton to nature magazines; anything suitable to increase the general knowledge of the children of all ages. I am sure there are many obsolete books in your schools. These can be sent to : Miss Natalie Pyke, 36 Lady's Mile Road, Patcham, Brighton, Sussex BN1 8QF, who will despatch them to the school in India.

As you know I am taking a team of doctors to Spiti in June. There are now 5 doctors who have signed up. We will meet Laji in Shimla and drive in through Kinnaur. From Tabu we will make our way through the villages where Jeet has arranged for clinics to be held. We will stay in local houses overnight. Some time will be spent in the new hospital in Kaja before we proceed north over the Kunzum La pass to Manali.

Thank you all for the support, time and energy you have put into this project, I look forward to showing you the result of your hard work in getting this hospital up and running. We must fix a date for the summer of 1995.

With all good wishes,

Joan Pollock