

41 WOODSFORD SQUARE
LONDON W14 8DP

1st December 1997

Dear Friends,

Recently, I returned from visiting the Hospital in the Spiti Valley. Fortunately my journey was straightforward with no serious hold-ups on the road.

I met Dr Laji in Manali; I had not announced that I was coming, but I was received with great enthusiasm! The Lady Willingdon Hospital in Manali has now increased its staff to two senior doctors and three junior doctors, plus four elective medical students from the U.K. This gives enough staff to cover the Spiti hospital and a rotation is in operation. The idea of building a school in Kaza which was Laji's next plan has been rejected by the local people and they refused to give any land. There is a government school which they say is good enough, so the idea has been abandoned.

The Spiti hospital has progressed tremendously since last year, largely due to your kind contributions. It is now staffed by a senior doctor (surgeon), 4 junior doctors and two nurses. They have a jeep and spend part of their time visiting the surrounding villages to undertake clinics. This is very helpful to the people, especially during harvest when there is no time to make the journey to Kaza.

It is wonderful to think that the doctor's village visits that we started four years ago have now become the norm. You may remember that we took teams of four to five doctors to the Spiti Valley each year. They came at their own expense, bringing their own medicines and spending their holidays treating the people of the Spiti Valley.

Laji has now taken over total control of the hospital, which is only right as the ongoing running of it should be in the hands of the local people. He tells me he has given the use of one room to the Rotary Club of Canada for a two year project aimed at school drop-outs. There is still a need for donations of equipment for an operating theatre which I will continue to support. At our charity lunch you will be invited to contribute towards pieces of equipment if you should so wish.

My drive to Kaza took much longer this year due to the traffic. The Sutlej River in the southern part of Spiti which runs along the Kinnaur valley had burst its banks and took away 4 kilometres of road to Simla. It also formed a lake in Kinnaur for which the government has supplied boats. The result of this is that all the goods, including what is left of the harvest, has to be transported through Spiti over the Rhotang pass to reach Delhi. You can imagine how these big trucks are damaging the small mountain roads. There have been many accidents and hold-ups this year.

THE NEXT OBJECTIVE IS TO IMPROVE THE LOT OF THE WOMEN OF THE VALLEY AND SO THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF THE ENTIRE FAMILY.

HOW AM I GOING TO DO THIS?

SET UP THE SWINNERTON SPITI WOMENS FOUNDATION.

The object of this exercise is to preserve the unique culture of this valley.

To give the women a feeling of self worth in that they can earn money from the beautiful shawls and knitted wear that they make.

To encourage the young people to learn and continue these crafts.

ON SUNDAY 26TH APRIL 1998

PLEASE NOTE THE DATE IN YOUR DIARY AND BRING YOUR FRIENDS.

We are hoping to raise enough money to build an ALL YEAR, WELL INSULATED BUILDING WHICH WILL HOUSE LOOMS AND A SPINNG WHEEL.

It will also be used for;
GENERAL HEALTH TRAINING and BETTER MOTHERHOOD in which
PALDEN DOLMA will be involved.

The building will also be an outlet for the wonderful handicraft work of the local women. This I hope will help to preserve the unique style of shawls woven in this Valley, also the beautiful style of knitted garments made locally. In the summer the building will be able to offer an excellent lunch stop for foreign groups and trekkers on their way to purchase the garments made by local people. The foundation will be run by Tenzin on a day to day basis and the official books will be kept by Jeet.

I will be taking a group to Kaza around the 25th July to 8th August 1998. Please come and join us and see for yourselves how your money has been spent. This trip will be very flexible, we will go to kaza together, from there you may split up into parties of 4 (one jeep) and continue to Ladakh, go trekking in the hills, stay in Spiti visiting the villages, and so on. THERE ARE MANY OPTIONS.

With all good wishes

Joan Pollock