

# Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

September 2010

Taktse International School  
PO Box 90, Gangtok, Sikkim, India 737101 • [www.taktse.org](http://www.taktse.org)



*Nancy Bonne of Rockport, MA died unexpectedly of a heart attack on July 14, 2010 during her second visit to Taktse. She was a retired librarian who helped organize Taktse's library, and shared her love of books with students, teachers and parents. A plaque in Taktse's library will commemorate her contributions.*

## **Grandmother of the Library**

*by Maria Lauenstein*

Our dear friend Nancy Bonne is very much on our minds. In the days before she died, Nancy was beginning to teach Miss Yangchen and Miss Subba, the two Taktse librarians, how to make an attractive bulletin board and display table for books, when she died. There is now a wonderful display of books just outside the library door. Above it is an illustrated bulletin board. Altogether, it looks so lively and engaging. In ways like this, Nancy's legacy lives on.

Here in Sikkim, there are no undertakers or funeral homes. When someone dies, it falls to family and friends. Many people in the Taktse community expressed their respect and affection for Nancy by helping in many ways. Lok Babu, a Taktse Board member, met us all at the hospital the morning Nancy died, and helped carry her body to the morgue with Sonam, Pintso, Aka, several others, and me. Nancy was always attended with the utmost love and respect.

Lok Babu found a beautiful coffin, and arranged for the cremation. We took her to the cremation ground in a white vehicle dotted with fresh flowers. Nancy's funeral service was very moving, with an solemn procession and many Christian and Buddhist prayers.



Later we remembered Nancy at school. During morning assembly, students wrote about a favorite book, or a fond memory of Nancy. Two hundred butter lamps lined the hallway, and during the course of the day students and teachers from each class came down and lit them. Monks from Chorten came and hoisted several white prayer flags on the hill that rises behind the school.

In the afternoon the whole school gathered to share reflections of Nancy. One by one students and teachers stood up and read what they had written, or simply said how much they loved Nancy, her book talks, and her presence in the library. They spoke about how kind-hearted she was, and how her love of books amazed them. Many said that her book talks made them want to read, or inspired their parents to read to them. Many called her "Grandmother of the Library." Several people wept. Many said they still couldn't believe Nancy is gone. It was very powerful, and helped us cope with our great sense of loss. Afterwards, Miss Suman took her classes out to the white prayer flags fluttering on the hill, and talked about Nancy, books, life and death.



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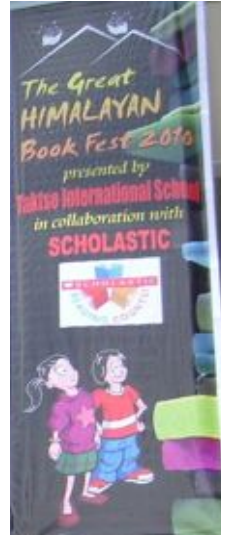
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*Shiksha Guruama is the homeroom teacher for Grade V. She has been teaching at Taktse since 2008. She applies her creative talents as advisor for the Taktse candle-making club, helping students make beautiful candles. Her other interests include knitting & fashion design.*

**Great Himalayan Book Fest**  
by Shiksha Guruama

Taktse's first Great Himalayan Book Fest, co-sponsored by Scholastic, the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books, was held May 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Scholastic, which works closely with teachers, parents and students to encourage reading in English, provided all the books for the Book Fest.



The school had a festive look with colorful balloons, festoons and banners hanging in the upper courtyard. Heshel, the youngest student in our school, cut the ribbon marking the opening of the event. During the first two days, students browsed and filled up their wish lists. The third day was the day of the book sale.

Mr. Namgyal, one of the organizers of the Book Fest; Mr. Lauenstein, our principal; and I wanted this day to be fun for all. Several other students and teachers helped us prepare. We started with faculty talking to students about their favorite books. Read-aloud, sketching, and a typing contest came next.

After noon, the parents and guests from other schools started to pour in. Despite our meticulous scheduling of parents of children of different grades to avoid over-crowding, all the parents of all the grades simultaneously marched up the Audio-Visual room where the book sale was being held. To our relief, it wasn't as chaotic as we had feared. Students and faculty played live music, and everyone relaxed the moment they stepped inside.

Some of the parents browsed or read to their children. Others settled themselves in the cozy bamboo sofas while their kids browsed. Since there was only one cashier, and some three hundred people buying books, there was a long checkout queue. Meanwhile, in the upper courtyard, students, parents and other guests bought T-shirts and snacks from stalls manned by the ninth and tenth graders. The goodies vanished quickly. At the end of the fair there was a drawing, which was won by a scholarship student named Tsheten (read Tsheten's story on page 5).



Sales were approximately 166,000 Rupees (approximately \$3,500) of which Taktse received 15% in books for our library.

Parents loved the Book Fest, and students had fun buying books and getting involved in all the activities. The Taktse faculty deemed the event a huge success. Next time we hope to have an even bigger and better Book Fest with more schools participating.

The following project-based learning exercise was inspired by Stan Chu of the Bank Street School of Education in New York and Karen Gregg of Sant Bani School in Sanbornton, NH.



## Taktse's Post Office

by Menuka Diyali, third grade Social Studies teacher and club advisor

At Taktse we believe that our students should get hands-on experience. Every year we take the third graders on a field trip to the Gangtok General Post Office. Later they set up a mock post office at Taktse to simulate what they saw and learned. Students and faculty members are invited to post letters to friends and teachers within the school.

This year the third graders were very excited about setting up the mock post office. They had seen it done the year before and wanted to do it themselves. They made picture stamps and envelopes, and signs to attract people to the post office. They made bags for the student mailmen to carry letters and deliver them.



We talked about the expectations and the roles to be played. We assigned postal duties and practiced them, so that we would not make errors and the post office would run efficiently. Tshering, Yangden Bhutia, Yeshey, and Meher gave out stamps and envelopes. Tonnop, Tashi, Rheah, Tshedel, and Sogyal stood near the mail box to help customers address their letters properly. Pema Chozum and T.Y. Lachungpa sorted the mail according to grade and teacher. Khenrab, Jaswant, Rheah and Anya delivered the letters. I was the postmaster supervising the student postal workers.

The students were eager and ready on the day of the post office. We discussed our roles one last time, and then we all got busy setting up three mailboxes, and opened the post office during the three recesses at 9:55, 11:45 and 3:15.

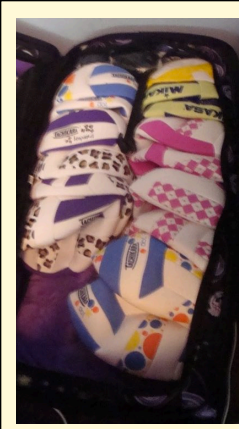
We scheduled the younger classes (kindergarten through fourth grade) at 9:55 and 3:15, and the older students during the 11:45 recess. Faculty members were welcome at all three recesses. A postal clerk was on duty to help customers. When the post office closed at 3:30, students sorted, stamped and delivered letters to students and faculty members.

Afterwards we had discussions and reflections. We got excellent responses from the Taktse community. The experience of simulating a real post office helped the students appreciate how mail gets handled in real life. We are looking forward to next year when we will be organizing another mock post office with new third graders.



### Newsletter Articles Wanted!

Share your connections to Taktse through the Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*.  
Send articles and photos to: Lonnie Friedman at [lonnie.friedman@comcast.net](mailto:lonnie.friedman@comcast.net).



## Volleyball at Taktse!

With the help of the Evergreen High School Boosters Club, Katie Ryan of Arvada, Colorado raised funds to purchase volleyball equipment for Taktse. She then journeyed to Sikkim and coached students and faculty on the fundamentals of the game.

For more, visit:

<http://katiesendeavors.blogspot.com/>



## Ninth Graders star in The Crucible

*by Tenzing Choden Namgyal, Taktse Ninth Grader*

This past June, we ninth graders and our teachers put on The Crucible, a play about the Salem witch trials by Arthur Miller. We chose this play in part because it was on the syllabus for the tenth graders, and we thought it would help them do well on their test. We didn't know how much we'd get engrossed in the play ourselves. At first, many of us couldn't relate to the characters, but as we learned our parts we found ourselves more able to empathize with them. Pooja slowly started to relate to her character Abigail William, even crying like Abigail when she looks for John Proctor. Tseteej too found a little piece of John Proctor in himself, relating to Abigail, not as Tseteej, but as John Proctor.



The idea of putting on The Crucible came from our English teacher, Mrs. Denjongpa, but the person who made it all possible was Jim Watrus, a visiting teacher from Waring School in Beverly, MA. He was our critic, our director, and our guide. He pushed us to memorize our lines and understand our characters. Often we'd find ourselves walking in the Audio Visual room, which doubles as our theater, as if we were the characters we were portraying. Though I found it strange at first, I think that helped us to think and act in character.

On the day of the play, we'd memorized our lines, dressed in our costumes, and were eager to show everyone the results of our hard work. Each of us walked on stage as the character we'd become over the preceding weeks. Whether it was shouting "I want my Mama," or saying something simple like "The sun is up. What say you Proctor?" we finally had our audience. At the end, we shared hugs and hurrahs for our achievements and for Jim. Taking the final bow, amid ovation and loud applause, made all the hard work worthwhile.

After it was over, we got pats on the back and hugs from people we didn't even know. One of the parents told me I did a good job, so I thanked him. But then he said thank you to me.



Though our performance wasn't perfect, we were pleased with how well we had done. We look forward to having Jim back at Taktse, and doing another play with him. Next time, I'd like to be a stronger character, perhaps someone like Abigail. Next time, I feel confident that with this experience behind us, we can portray our characters even more convincingly.



## Tsheten's Story

by Kaye Hamilton-Smith

My husband and I sponsored a boy named Tsheten as a monk in Bhutan, and briefly met him in October 2008. Then, in December 2009 we returned to Bhutan as volunteers at the Bhutan Youth Development Fund (YDF). We also hoped to get to know Tsheten better.

Well, when we arrived at the airport Tsheten was given to us 24/7 from day one. He was a handful! He could not speak English, although he understood a little from TV. He could not write the English alphabet, or his own Dzongkha alphabet for that matter. He had been placed in a monastery at age five and had not learned much over the ensuing four years. Tsheten was tiny for his age. His parents were alcoholics, so that may have stunted his growth and created attention deficit.



He hated books and had bad temper tantrums. We never had children of our own, so we had trouble coping with his frequent meltdowns and inability to communicate.

Luckily, Taktse was running a two-week winter camp at YDF so we enrolled Tsheten while we did our volunteer work. We really expected the Taktse teacher to give him back within the first hour because of his bad behavior. To our surprise and relief, he lasted the day. The teacher said he was behind the six year olds academically, but his behavior was fine.



That night, he was a changed child. His mood was so much better! He did not seem so angry. He liked going to the Taktse camp. He was proud of his accomplishments. He willingly did homework with my husband, and pointed out letters he had learned on English signs as we walked around Thimphu.

Tsheten did not want to go back to the monastery. He wanted to continue to go to school. We did not have the heart to leave him at the monastery so we arranged to enroll him as a boarding student at Taktse School in Sikkim, and found a wonderful foster family in Bhutan to take care of him during school breaks.

Tsheten has been at Taktse for five months now. He can write full sentences, enjoys listening to me read books to him on Skype, and uses words instead of temper tantrums to communicate his anger and frustrations, at least most of the time.

Taktse has been the most wonderful school – just perfect for Tsheten. The staff's dedication to the kids is amazing! Their teaching approach really works! They tailored a special curriculum for Tsheten, now a ten year old with the English skills of a six year old. Pintso Lauenstein, the principal of Taktse, has included us in Tsheten's school experience via Skype from day one, and we enjoy Skype video calls with Tsheten every week or two. Tsheten continually surprises us with new words and ideas with every call. As a monk, Tsheten had a shaved head, but now he has a lovely head of hair, and has grown a bit now that he is eating properly.

We are Taktse's #1 fans! We can't wait until November 29<sup>th</sup> when we will arrive at Taktse to thank the staff in person, and take Tsheten for a six-week vacation. My favorite photo is of Tsheten, my little Superman, flying! That's what Taktse does – allows children to fly!



