

A Girl I Met Today...

Musings and Meanderings



The following is a story written as a reflection of my time spent in India teaching Tibetan children in exile. As a member of the International Teacher Education Module I spent 2 months teaching English in a small community called Chauntra, tucked in the foothills of the Himalayas. The students, teachers, and members of the community were very welcoming and their story has inspired me on many levels. It was this life changing and eye-opening experience that has transformed the way I view both learning and teaching. With this story I hope to give my readers a brief glimpse into the life of a Canadian student named Madison that is introduced to the world of a Tibetan student in India. Madison experiences a transformation that can only be seen in her heart and her actions.

A Girl I Met Today..

"Madison!"

"Ugh..."

"**Madison!** It is time to get up... **NOW!**" yelled her mother from the kitchen.

"Okay, okay, I'm getting up." Madison said grumbling on her



Tibetan prayer flags are believed to spread happiness and long-life as the wind passes through them.

way to the bathroom.

Madison did not want to go to school today. Why did she have to go anyway, *so* not fair.

At the kitchen table Madison slurped her milk and fruit loops as her mother made her lunch for her. Leaving her bowl and a puddle of milk on the table Madison grabbed her lunch bag full of yummy goodies for her to eat at school. Chocolate chip cookies, grapes, a ham

and cheese sandwich and a bottle of chocolate milk.

"Have a good day at school sweetheart." called her mother.

"See ya." yelled Madison as she shrugged out the door.

Later, after a *painfully* long morning, Madison was sitting in her least favourite class, 5th grade French. Mr. Levitt was teaching the class the days of the week in French when Madison's eyes started to close. Each word he pronounced began to blend together with the next until Madison could not hear him anymore.

The next noise she heard was something she had never heard before.

"*Tashi delek.*"

"huh?"

"*Tashi delek.*" said the voice again.

Realizing she was no longer sitting at her desk in French class Madison opened her eyes to find that she was actually laying in a hard bed in a very large room, in

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front of her stood a girl about 10 years old.

"Tashi delek, it means Hello." The stranger explained.

"Who are you?" said Madison. "And where am I?" she added.

"My name is Tsering. You are in my bed... this is the girls' hostel at C.S.T. Chauntra, in India.

What is your name?"

"I'm Madison... did you say..... **I N D I A!**"

Madison began to scream, how did she get to India?

Before she could ask Tsering anymore questions Madison was being pulled out of the large room of bunk beds. Now they were in a big open area where lots of children were playing with a very old and flat soccer ball.

"Tsering," asked Madison once they finally stopped, "If we are in India, why don't you look like my friends who moved from

India last year?"

"We are not Indian." Tsering said, pointing to the other students. "All of the students and most of the teachers here are Tibetan. Our great country Tibet has seen much war and fighting for the last 50 years. My parents left so that my brothers and I could have a good education and not have to be scared anymore."

with your family? Where are they?" asked Madison. She was still in shock after hearing she was in India; she couldn't believe that Tsering had to *live* at school.

"My family lives far away in a different city and state of India. It takes many days to reach them during our school holiday," said Tsering, in a quiet voice.

"Do you miss your family?"

Our great country Tibet has seen much war and fighting for the last 50 years.

Madison listened very carefully as Tsering continued her story.

"There are almost 400 students that go to this school. C.S.T. stands for Central School for Tibetans. Most of us live in the hostels, where I found you, but some are only day scholars that go home at night."

"You mean, you don't live

"Yes, very much." said Tsering.

Madison could not imagine being so far away from her mom and dad like Tsering is.

It made Madison sad to think about it.

After showing Madison around the courtyard, Tsering brought her to the room for Class 5 A. Tsering explained that they had just finished lunch and the next class would start in just a few minutes. "What do you eat for lunch?" asked Madison curiously.

"Every day we have rice and daal. Daal is made of chickpeas and lentils. Some days we get tingmo, a yummy steamed bun. I love the days we get tingmo!" Tsering was excited thinking about it. Madison didn't say anything, but she thought that eating the same thing every day was kind of boring. She was glad that her mom would give her different snacks each day.



The students of Class 4A and 5A threw a party for me on my last day teaching.

Without any warning all of the students in the class, about 25 of them, stood and chanted, “Good Afternoon Ma-Dam.” Madison was amazed, her class did not do *anything* like that when her teachers came in the room. The students stood at attention until the teacher, Madam Sonam, said they could sit down. Weird, thought Madison. After the school day was over at 3:45, Madison had thought of *so* many questions for Tsering. They walked to the field and Tsering gladly answered them all. “We go to school Monday to Friday, and every other Saturday. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama teaches all Tibetans about the importance of education. With education and compassion we can change the world.”

The new friends walked back towards the girls’ hostel so Tsering could do her reading before dinner. Madison started thinking about what she would be doing if she was at home in Canada. Sitting on the bed Madison was thinking about her parents when her eyes began to flutter. Within in minutes she was fast asleep.

“Madison... Madison... MAD-ISON!”

Madison opened her eyes to see Mr. Levitt standing in front of her. How did she get back so quickly? “Madison, can you tell the class what ‘hello’ is in French?”

“*Tashi delek*,” said Madison. “Oops, I mean...um... Bonjour.”

“Eyes on the board Madison.” said the teacher as he walked back to the front of the class.

“Sorry Mr. Levitt, it will not happen again.” Madison surprised everyone; she normally would

not have apologized. Something seemed different about her.

After school Madison walked home slowly as she thought about everything she had learned from Tsering. As soon as she walked in the front door Madison ran up and gave her mother a big hug. “Thanks mom!” she said.

“What was that for?” her mother asked, in shock.

“For everything you do! Tsering’s family lives so far away and I am glad that I get to stay with you, I love you!” Madison gave her mother another hug and skipped off to do her homework, a job that was normally like pulling teeth. Her mother, seeing Madison working quietly at the kitchen table, was amazed. Just as she was about to turn around, she stopped and asked, “Madison, who is Tsering?”

“Oh,” said Madison, smiling, “she is just a girl I met today.” 🌱

Please see below for more pictures of Megan’s experience.





A view of the main street and school gates
from the roof of my guest house.



Classrooms at C.S.T. Chauntra



Surrounded by the beauty
of nature in Chauntra.