

HEALTH

Thanarbaid

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THANARBAID HEALTH CARE CENTER NEWS

CHRISTMAS 1998

Greetings from the staff and patients of the Thanarbaid Health Care Center (THCC). As usual we are a bit late in getting out our thanks and Christmas message to you. We know you understand and that is part of the reason you remain our friends. So with Christmas greetings we wish you a blessed New Year too.

On 7 September this year, this correspondent went with Dr. Edric Baker and staff to the Airport in Dhaka to greet a not-so young lady. She was coming at the invitation of the Health Center as a helper and associate of Dr. Baker. How Edric had longed for this day since the departure of Judy Walter some years back. The day had arrived. We carried hand written signs in our hands since we did not know or even have a picture of the courageous woman. **LIBBY LAING** the sign read.

In the Zia International Airport as everywhere in Bangladesh there are people, people, people, pushing, pushing, pushing. What are they doing there? Gawking at the newcomers, hawking riders for the 3-wheeled Baby taxis, stalking for alms, balking at police orders, or walking along, selling their little wares. All these persons are here to greet the new arrivals and us. Our goal is to get inside the *arrival area* so we can meet our new companion. The entrance cost is Taka 20.00, half the day's wage for a laborer (about US \$.50). The government's reason for doing this is to keep the outside crowd from becoming the inside melee. Once inside we have in front of us is a 6-foot barrier with plexiglass windows. We can see the incoming passengers. Because we have never seen her or her picture before, we hold our hand written sign above the barrier to show it more clearly. We know she is a woman. We know she is a bit elderly. So we don't shout at the young ladies. Finally we see a lovely matronly looking woman, all by herself, glancing toward us greeters. Yes, **Libby Laing** sees our sign. I shout to her to go *left* outside and we will meet her at the gate. A skycap gives her a hand, which usually ends up in arguments, and off she goes to the *right*. I rush outside to shout to her but it is 70 or 80 meters to the other side. Finally she ends up at our gate. I am in a lather. But this new arrival is calm, smiling, unperturbed. I was impressed. **ELIZABETH (LIBBY) LAING** is going to be a definite asset to the work of the THCC and Dr. Baker.

Libby is a widow from Taupo, New Zealand, and Dr. Edric's own country. Her husband died some 8 years ago. She has a grown daughter and son. Her profession is as a registered comprehensive nurse. For the past 7 years she has been out of the hospital and serving as a community nurse, specializing in care for mothers and their under 5 year old children. She says she loves the work. Though she is a year older than Edric, who is 57, she has led an active physical life. When Canon Ron Taylor who is one of the sponsors for the Health Center, told Libby that most of the transportation is by bicycle, meaning to warn her, Libby responded, "Good. I just rode a good bit this morning." Canon Taylor was amazed. This is a short portrait of the lady who has come to help the simple Bangladeshi people in the far villages.

I asked Libby, as one newly arrived on the scene what thoughts about the whole work of the Health Center. She said she felt happy and comfortable. At present she lives about a 10-minute walk from the Center, in the mission compound of St Paul Parish. While it is not the Hilton it does have a few more amenities than Dr. Baker provides, like a bed and her own private bath room with running water *when you pour it over your head*. She told me that the people of the Health Center gave her a wonderful, warm welcome, which included interesting dramas and songsters. She had a lot of pictures to prove it.

While Dr. Edric made his annual 30 day silent retreat (some of us would find it hard to keep silent for a week) Libby stayed 5 weeks in Dhaka with some Marists Sisters from New Zealand. Even in this bustling town of 9 million people, unruly traffic and noise, Libby found the local people friendly and hopeful. That hope has to come from a deep longing, not present in the daily situation. There, Libby was busy with study of the Bengali language. She struggled and struggles with it. She finds her memory is not up to the task but is determined to continue with it. She is not discouraged and is studying both the spoken and the written language with a tutor.

As to the Health Care Center itself she sees it growing and of great service to the people of the area. Dr. Baker philosophy of involving the local people in their own health needs is in agreement with her own views as a community health nurse for so many years. There are already areas where she hopes to be of help to Edric, especially for keeping in touch with you all, not to mention her own area of competence.

This writer finds Libby making a remarkable adaptation to this land despite the fact that she had never before been outside New Zealand. This grows even after a stiff setback in her health. During her days in Dhaka she contacted *dengue fever*, a mosquito borne disease, which weakens a person considerably. Fortunately one of the Sisters is a doctor and diagnosed it quickly. Libby is still weak but gradually getting her feet on the ground or rather her seat on the bike. ~~Outside~~ of this correspondent have told me that the manner and appearance of Edric has had some noticeable changes. The Health Center has a **MOTHER**.

The last time I went to visit the Health Center they had gathered for their Morning Prayer. All the staff members, regardless of their religion attend it. That morning I heard a prayer in Arabic by a Muslim fellow and hymns by **Tagor** (one of the great writers of India and a Nobel Prize winner for Literature about 1913). This practice is at the heart of Dr. Baker's whole movement. The health he is striving for is an internal healing among peoples. It is known in medical circles that persons, who are at peace within, have many less health problems than persons who are in turmoil do. However, Dr. Baker's many purposes flow from love and belief in Jesus and his message. The healing is secondary. The prayer service is a real communion because included are the work assignments for the day, the prayer for the sick present and in the villages and who will be responsible for visiting them. Prayer has to do also with the team spirit and first of all, the relationship between staff members. Someone told me it is a dream to expect such results. Dr. Edric is a dreamer and pursues it, reaping where he can even a small harvest for Jesus' Kingdom.

Just to keep things grounded in reality and not up in heaven somewhere, we will describe briefly some of the people and incidents in which the Health Center is involved.

Cushed is a tribal man who has deep depressions though when he takes his medicine, he is capable of good work. So Edric hired him for a handyman. An educated young Muslim lady with a mind of her own, fell in love with him. Defying her parents she married him. Well, that was a catch for the Center. They were looking for someone with a bit of education to handle certain tasks. Thus the Health Center is playing Cupid and keeping the marriage together, although perhaps incurring the anger of her parents.

In one of villages a 12-year-old boy disappeared on his way to school and had not been seen for some 19 days. The mystery is that the school is only 40 meters away. Not infrequently one can read in the local papers that young boys have been sold into the Middle East for Camel racing. They tie the boys to the saddle and send the camel off running. The family is still hopeful. Not long ago the police broke up a gang stealing and dealing in children and returned them to their homes.

Sitting on the veranda, holding a 6 months old child, was a not too friendly looking grandmother. Dr. Baker has some choice words about her. This woman has so pushed and persecuted the child's mother to get a dowry from her parents that the mother of two ran away. Such are the ways of people when survival is for the fittest and it takes money to survive. At least the grandmother brought the baby in for some medical care.

Another Mandi or tribal baby was there for treatment too. The mother, a nice looking young woman had run off to live with a Muslim worker. There was nothing but strife in the village because of her presence so they finally divorced. Now the divorcee is living with her own mother and caring for the child. Another broken home.

On another tact I was introduced to **Sironjon**, a strong healthy looking young man. The doctor told me that he was a chronic, relapsing, resistant *kalazar* (*black fever*) patient now in good health. I noticed Edric's fingers were crossed when he spoke all those adjectives. It is a fragile success story for the Health Center since the young lad was at death's door a number of times.

Those few incidents and there are many more told previously in these notes and not yet told, that show the dream of Dr. Baker (*see the Christian communities in the Acts of the Apostles, Acts 2:42ff*) is a long way from being realized. In a sense you are members afar of this communal effort by the material and spiritual support you give. Here, I recall an incident in my own life. In the Philippines I was complaining to my superior of how little the people understood and lived out their faith in my area. The superior set me on my heels by saying, "Isn't it good you came?" He hit me between the eyes. Jesus did not come for the saved but for sinners - LIKE ME.

The staff of THCC staff wishes you again a **Blessed Christmas and a Peaceful New Year**.

DR. EDRIC BAKER/ VIL.-THANARBAID/ PO PIRGACHA/ MADHUPUR, TANGAIL 1996
BANGLADESH

Correspondent: (Rev) Douglas F Venne MM (email<mk_oneye@bd.drik.net>)