

HEALTH

Thanarbaid

CENTER

CARE

BANGLADESH

Thanarbaid Health Care Center New Notes

MAY 1997

Greetings again from the peopled land of Bangladesh. Dr.. Edric Baker and his whole staff wish you the best (*Achalam O Walaikum - Peace to you* in Arabic / *Nomuskar - a Hindu greeting which is a blessing / Jisur Pronam - Praise be Jesus* and in the tribal dialect - *Jisu na rasong*) and thank you for your interest in our people and in his work. You are generous partners with him in this venture for the Lord.

I visited Dr. Edric during Easter time and as usually he had numerous interesting stories to tell. During this last visit I felt I was listening to some involved Television plots. Indeed, it was a like a court of First Instance. As such it has little to do with doctoring but much to do with healing people. How can I describe all the twists and turns to you? Hatim is one of Dr.. Edric's trusted workers. That doesn't mean he is a saint. Not far from the Center lived a sick woman with her niece. They were seldom visited by anyone. Her granddaughter came and began to look after the elderly woman. It was reported that the young woman had some kind of skill as a masseur. No longer was the place unvisited. Some men were seen entering Grandma's hut. One among them was Hatim, Edric's helper. However he did not walk there. He rode one of the Health Center's bicycles without permission. Unfortunate for Hatim, someone had big eye's for the unlocked bike and rode off with it. Needless to say, that poor visitor was distressed. When he reported to Dr. Baker his pitiful situation, he swore that he would get the bike back. And try he did! Going hither and thither he discovered the two wheeler. The reported thieves were Mukhur and Eedrish. He got the cycle back. A village trial was held for the two culprits but it was discerned that there was not enough evidence to convict them, meaning they had some clout.

It so happens that the dwelling that so recently attracted men, was in a village covered by the Center's integral health care program. Bicycles are indispensable to carrying on such an extension project. So Edric decided it was time to have an evaluation of that particular hamlet. A meeting was called. It was not billed a trial but a big crowd of people turned out, sensing it was more than the usually survey. As in all meetings in villages of Bangladesh the leaders sat on a bench while the simple people are made to squat or stand. Edric chose to do the later, his sign of solidarity with the masses. Leo, the Health Center's coordinator spoke about the different aspects needed for village cooperation and then called on Dr.. Baker for a few comments. Edric pointed out the great need for bicycles to administer to the villages. If the cycles were stolen, as had happened in this village, it would be necessary to stop the village visits. What did the people want? Yes, they wanted the care and were very angry with the ones who stole the health workers transportation. It was suggested that surely the village leaders could catch the guilty ones and impose fitting recompense. A second trial was held and Mukhur and Eedrish were implicated this time. (It sounds a bit like the O J Simpson trial in USA) They were fined Taka 10,000 (\$250 - a big amount in this country). Of that sum the Health Care Center received Taka 1,000. (Sic!)

Oh, that is not the end of the story. Hatim is a good man. He truly serves the people who come to the Center. Muslim though he is, he keeps a picture of Jesus in his house, which is unusual for someone in his religion. One morning five or six days after the fining of Mukhur and Eedrish, Hatim on waking, went out to pasture his cows. Lo, they were not there. He searched around and came to a small thatch shelter where he saw some spent cigarette butts. Inside were a couple of men he did not know. They immediately attached him, and beat him up. One pulled a dagger and Hatim screamed for help after which he fainted. It probably saved his life because the men took off, thinking he was dead. Indeed, he was badly beaten up and when I visited, but has recuperated quite well at the Center under Dr. Edric's care. Everyone knows that the pounding he took is related to the bicycle incident and fining of the other two culprits. Thus we see Dr.

Momataz has been coming to the clinic for 10 years. She has very a serious diabetic problem. But she is one of those indomitable persons who see a need and are willing to sacrifice themselves to help others. This became evident in 1988 when Bangladesh had the highest and most extensive flood in its history. Momataz went all out to help those in need through her own creativity even though she is herself a poor woman. She became a local heroine.

Men like to marry a good woman and Momataz proved to all that she was. So some time after the flood she was married to Siddik. He came from a family of some standing whereas her family was poor. The man's parents were against the marriage and so were the folks of Momataz. Neither side thought it would work out. They were right. Not because Momataz did not work at it. Her husband for some reason, no one seems to know why, was against her receiving medical care for her illness. Of course without it she would have died long ago. But that is how cruel some can be. She lost 3 babies at birth because her man would not allow her to get treatment. She did have one daughter, Miriam who is about 8 years old now.

One day this brave lady came to the Center with her daughter Miriam in tow. She was not going to go back to that woman-beater. Her body was wasting away. She had a constant cough. Her husband had sent her out to get some cigarettes. Since she was not able to get any at the time, he beat both her and her daughter. She locked herself in so he could not get to her where upon he threatened to strangle his own daughter if she did not open up. So there she was at the Health Center, not wanting to return home. Who would? What to do?

Dr. Edric consulted with Fr Gene Homrich, the local pastor. They both thought the best thing was a legal divorce. Then the man would have no right over her or young Miriam. While the divorce papers were being processed, the father sent his sister over to fetch the young girl. It seems some people can't live with others or without them. However the girl was now beginning to reflect on the fact that her father was not normal. So she did not take the bait. The divorce papers came through and Edric passed them to the husband by means of a village leader, some thing like a summons. He could not then say he did not know about it. Now Momataz and Miriam are in the Health Care's other facility which oversees programs for diabetes and tuberculosis (TB).

And again the story is not ended. Just a few days before I visited Thanarbaid and about one month after the divorce was finalized, the father was hiding in the bushes outside the diabetes treatment area in Kailakuri. When Miriam and her mother went to a little local store, he signaled the girl and gave her new pair of shorts and a nice blouse for Momataz. He asked his daughter to come back, bringing her mother. In Islam after a divorce such an act is strictly forbidden. It is Dr. Edric's fear that some day the fellow will once again get Momataz and Miriam back under his control. The poor fellow never learned that kindness goes a long way toward fulfilling happiness. Would that you could sit with Dr. Baker himself and hear the stories. It does not make any difference what day you would come. Life is always providing with real life soap operas. However here real folks get hurt unlike the drama on the tube.

KAILAKURI is a center, set up a couple of years ago to care for diabetic and tubercular patients. The center serves an area of about 15 miles in each direction with an estimated population of a 100,000. While it is located in a rather isolated place, about 3/4 miles away populous areas start to spring up. In terms of distance from the main Health Center, it is about a 20 minute bicycle ride over roads that are little more than ox cart paths. Edric and I each rode a bike there. Kailakuri has an area of just about one football (soccer) field. Recently the doctor was able, because of your generosity, to buy another strip of land adjoining one side of the property. He hopes to develop this into a more private place for the contagious TB residents. There is considerable area for gardening. The patients are encouraged to do much of the work. For both diabetes and TB many fresh vegetables and other produce that can be grown are necessary. Hatim of whom we have written in the first episode is the chief gardener for this care facility. He should be back soon sowing good seed. The rains are coming, June to August and September.

Who comes to his place? Diabetic and tubercular sick persons, of course. At present there about 72 persons who come regularly to receive diabetic tests and medicine. At present only there are 6/7 patients being supervised and cared for in the shelters here. Their stay is usually 1 or 2 weeks. The purpose is three

thirdly taught what to do at times when complications set in. The sick move on as soon as they know how to care for themselves. They come back to renew their supply of medicine. All the medicine is either free or bought at a very reduced price. Such medication is supplied by the Bangladesh Diabetic Association. The Association has very excellent hospital in Dhaka, run by a very dedicated doctor. However this does not usually apply to their extensions services around the country. Dr. Baker feels that the service given at this facility is about the only real hope people in our rural area have for control of diabetes.

Kailakuri also serves another very important purpose. It is a center for TB patients to come. Persons with TB need a long period of medication to achieve a full recovery. Unfortunately the medicine starts to work fairly quickly and they find themselves feeling quite good after a short while. This leads to a lack of concern for continuing their medicine intake. As a result the infection returns with a vengeance, producing TB bacteria which are harder and harder to control.

The program is actually run by a hospital in Jalchatra Corpus Christi parish mission area. The hospital formerly served people with leprosy and has expanded into the field of tuberculosis. It is worked by the Fr. Damien Foundation in conjunction with the Bangladesh Government. At present there are about 53 TB out-patients under the care of the Kailakur Center. If the persons are seriously ill they may have to spend some 2 weeks as in-patients to stabilize their condition. While at the Center classes are held daily to teach them about their illnesses and how they can with their simple life style avoid later complications. After this they go home, returning regularly for \medicine and check ups. All the medicine is issued free. It comes from the hospital and other groups mentioned above. While I was there some members of the staff of Jalchatra Hospital were there examining the TB records. I was impressed by the diligence of the workers, not found so often in such programs around the nation.

TB is a real scourge on a nation like Bangladesh because persons do not get proper nutrition. Tuberculosis attacks people in such conditions. Dr. Edric sees his coordination of care against this sickness and diabetes as very important to the integral health care he tries to give the people. He comes from the Health Care Center to oversee the work in this facility about 3 times a week. Much of his time he spends motivating the staff to give real care to the afflicted who come to them. Such care and time Jesus himself would give. Recently he had hopes of having another companion would join him at the Care Center but there are delays and uncertainties. Dr. Baker has even built a small adobe house for that reason. It will not go to waste. There will always be patients to fill the holy space. Please remember Dr. Edric in prayer as he strives to bring the compassion of the healing ministry to the very poor. If you know of any dedicated persons who would be willing and fit physically to give 2 or 3 years in like service, please encourage them to think about the possibility.

On the next page I am going to try to give you a schematic of the Kailakuri Diabetes and TB Center. Thank you again for your care and concern for the poor and sick of our country. In their name I want to express my gratitude. If I am acquainted with you personally please excuse me for not jotting a little note. Time constraints do not permit me the pleasure. Till next time.....

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