

SPRING STREET GALLERY

# Helping the heart of Nepal

By JENNIE GREY  
jgrey@saratogian.com  
Twitter.com/JGSaratogian

**SARATOGA SPRINGS** — From a city rich with springs, activist Karen Flewelling has traveled across the world with a mission to provide clean water in some of the poorest countries, including Nepal in South Asia. Now, Flewelling's work has been captured by Spa City photographer Emma Dodge Hanson, a fellow activist and close friend who journeyed to Nepal for two weeks with Flewelling. Their shared experience is on display in the month-long Spring Street Gallery exhibition "Faces of Nepal."

The main room in the gallery is hung with huge black and white photographs — bigger than life-sized — of Nepalese gazing at the photographer and, through her, the viewer. One image of an old woman shows a face etched with a lifetime of wrinkles radiating from her mouth, her cheeks and her forehead. Her mouth is a small pursed star, surrounded by rays. Her eyes are fixed serenely on us.

"Women in Nepal have to carry water from long distances away back to their homes," Flewelling said. "Schools lack running water, so you have 500 kids who get nothing to drink or eat all day until they go home to dinner. And Nepal is not a fun country to be thirsty in."

Flewelling's nonprofit, Drilling for Hope, focuses on building wells, both in Nepal and in other needy countries. She has gotten six wells dug in Nepal — by hand, not with a drilling rig — for \$1,000 each. Her 34 installed water filters keep out arsenic and silt. Giving people clean water has a ripple effect. Properly hydrated, the schoolchildren are healthier and perform better in their classes.

"But what they really go crazy for is a new soccer ball," Flewelling said. When she brings one in, the kids light up and dash off to play.

These Nepalese children beam and stare and peek



More photos online at saratogian.com

ED BURKE  
eburke@saratogian.com



Photos provided

At left, surrounded by photos in the Spring Street Gallery exhibit, "The Faces of Nepal," photographer Emma Dodge Hanson, left, sits with a friend, 9-year-old Riley Goodness, and Karen Flewelling, with whom she traveled to Nepal to help install wells for local villagers. ABOVE: Part of the exhibit, Flewelling joins a Nepalese child. BELOW: Photographs displayed in the exhibit.

out of their photographs. Hanson has caught them laughing, weeping and talking together. Two boys on one bicycle pause to rest or to look at something, talk and gesture as they brace the bike with their legs, looking at rice pickers against the horizon. The pickers earn \$4 per month.

In another picture, three toddlers sit against a wall on their first day of daycare. One little boy hides his face behind his sister. She beams at the viewer, her dark eyes full of sparkling reflections. The third child is looking at the little girl with a faintly puzzled expression.

"At first, the little girl was crying and crying," Hanson said. "But every child will smile if you play peekaboo. I like to crawl around inside the kids' hearts and make them laugh."

Flewelling said Hanson speaks to her subjects in a soothing tone that relaxes them.

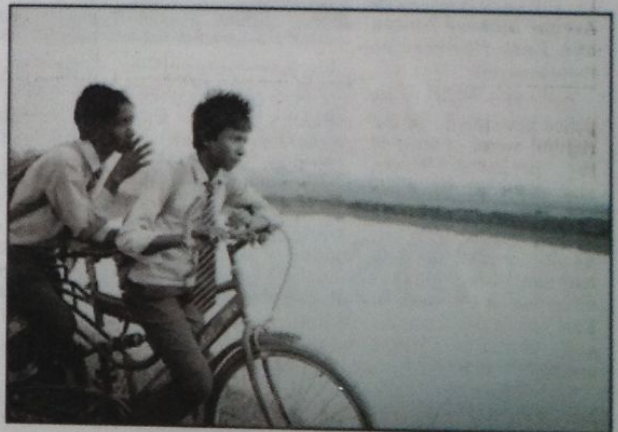
"It's a very shy culture," Hanson said.

However, the Nepalese are not too shy to barter over goats. Flewelling has much experience with goat-buying and is firm about her prices.

"The nicest man we met sold us a goat for only \$8, the fairest price we paid," Hanson said. "Another man charged us \$20. Karen wouldn't pay it. She walked away. She's incredible. She barters down taxi drivers until they're ready to cry."



Faces of Nepal



Flewelling is careful with the project's funds because they come from her sponsors and donors. She wants to use every penny wisely and well. If a local organization gives her a list of families that should have a goat, she goes door to door to check if they already have a

goat. With the help of her driver/interpreter, she speaks to the family's mother about caring for the goat and giving away its first female kid to another needy family. The women even sign contracts, though most of them are illiterate.

The goats are key to rural

Nepalese life. Families sleep with their goats and take them everywhere, Flewelling said. The people drink goat milk, make goat yogurt and eat goat meat. Hanson features the goats along one wall in the gallery's corridor.

Another wall features

Flewelling at work: watching a new goat-owner sign a contract, supervising well-digging and washing her hair with a small tin bucket in a hut. She seems to be in her element in every picture, doing the work she loves, watched by her friend the photographer.