

DREAMING AND WANDERING...

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The Native Land, Nepal

Nepal is a relatively small and poor country in South Asia bordering China to the north and India to the south, east and west. Most Nepalese are followers of Hinduism. They had a long and rich history, during which the region split and joined under a variety of absolute rulers. In 1990, Nepal became a constitutional monarchy. Increasing instability in the parliament marked this reality. Since 1996, Maoist insurgents alienated themselves from mainstream political parties. They went underground and started a guerilla war against both monarchy and mainstream political parties. The Maoists insurgents overthrew feudal institutions, including the monarchy, and established their form of republic. This led to a civil war where more than 12,000 people have died. On the pretext of suppressing the insurgents, who controls about 70% of the country, the king unilaterally declared a "state of emergency" in early 2005, closing down the parliament and assuming all executive powers.

It was during this turmoil in Nepal when Hasta decided to start the journey towards the west. Back then, he had a good life with his wife Saru and their little girl Krishna. They had their own house, a car and driver, while he worked as a respectable social worker. In his free time, he wrote and composed folk songs. Relatively, they belong to the middle class of Nepal society. However, the civil war pushed them to find a better and peaceful place to live. In fact, the military government killed some of his family members. His elderly mother and the youngest brother are the only family members who remain in Nepal.

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The Journey

Hasta and Saru left Nepal with their few belongings last June 2005. Saru was two months pregnant and Krishna was just eight months old. Their first stop was Bangkok, Thailand they stayed there for two weeks as tourists. After which, they flew to Frankfurt, Germany with a transit in Singapore also as tourists. In Frankfurt, they took another flight to Cuba and stayed there for twenty-four days just enough time to find the right connection to bring them to the shores of Mexico by boat.

Little Krishna's eyes were wide open in awe and the sea breeze blowing her hair, was so fascinated in their sea travel at the Caribbean Sea. She had no idea of the dangers and the nervousness of her parents and the other Nepalese guys as they sailed from the shores of Cuba towards Mexico. It took them two days and one night sailing the high seas to reach Chetumal, Mexico. Once they arrived the dry land, they presented themselves to the Mexican immigration authorities.

They were the few handful of migrants from Nepal who were able to reach Mexico with the hope and determination to finally reach the United States of America. Mexico is the last country before arriving the soils of the United States, the promise land. For the whole family, the boat trip from Cuba to Mexico cost them \$4,000.00 US dollars not including the expenses for food and water. By fate or destiny, they survived in good health.

The Last Stop

From Chetumal, Hasta together with the other Nepalese guys they were transferred to the detention center in Mexico City. At the detention center in Mexico City, they tried to apply for a refugee status but the long waiting list for the applicants at that time discouraged them to do so. Hasta, in particular, heard about a sister who helps the migrants most needy and started to contact me by phone. Then, I went to interview him during my regular visits at the detention center. He knew about me from the first Nepalese guys whom I had also helped months earlier before they arrived. Practically, he put all his trust and confidence all at once. It was then, he narrated his story and I was able to assess their situation. At the end, I made a proposition for him which I thought was the best option to speed up their case.

Meanwhile, Saru's belly was growing bigger and the Mexican immigration authorities give especial attention to women even more so to the pregnant ones. Not to mention that Hasta is with two crutches to walk because he suffered polio when he was a child. The picture of a family of

three, with a crippled father, a pregnant woman and almost a year old girl alarms every person who surrounds them. One cannot imagine how they were able to cross-countries and frontiers in their situation. However, the strong and decisive will of Hasta and Saru knows no boundaries.

With that, when I requested for their provisional custody the Mexican immigration authorities immediately considered my petition. They were released from the detention center after 58 days, short enough in comparison to 90 days or more of waiting for the resolution of one's case.

First things come first and I looked for a place for them to stay. I brought them to an apartment where the other migrants live. Since they are a family, they were given the family room. The place is not so ideal for Hasta because of the stairs but it was cheap and a safe place to be. However, the basic things like telephone and kitchen were available for their use.

Having gained their freedom again, so to speak, I was accompanying Saru to the doctor for her monthly check-up. The fact that they cannot speak Spanish, I had to accompany her to be the translator between here and the doctor. It was good news for all of us to know that the baby they were expecting is a boy and in a good shape. The sound of the baby boy's heart was a music to Saru's ears.

Yet, for more than one month, the everyday life in the city became impossible for them. Their few savings were almost at the drain for rental, food and other expenses. Soon enough they told me that they decided to leave Mexico for better or for worse.

Once again, they requested me to process their "salida definitiva" for humanitarian reason. Therefore, I solicited the Mexican migration authorities for the "salida definitiva" document they needed. This document allowed them to travel to the northern border and leave Mexico without any legal impediment. Since Nepal is suffering civil war, they asked the US authorities for asylum. Fortunately, they were released at the same day and traveled up to Virginia where their relatives were waiting for them. Last January 2006, Hasta called me over the phone to tell me that Saru gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Their second child is now an American citizen by birth. Until today, Hasta and Saru are still struggling to make both ends meet. In spite of that, they know that they can almost touch their dreams after wandering so many countries.

My Personal Vow

Migrant families always touched my very being, since I myself was a child of a migrant family. I lived in my flesh and blood the sufferings and

pains of separation as a consequence of migration. Only by faith and prayers, my family and myself were able to overcome all the tribulations and sorrows until the day we were united again.

It is with this personal experience that I can always see with the eyes of the resurrected Christ in the migrant families that come my way. The compassion and understanding I put in every encounter with the migrant, is the same compassion I believe I received from my Creator years back.

My work as the director of the Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants of the Archdiocese of Mexico¹ gives me the opportunity to realize my mission as a Scalabrinian Missionary Sister. It is a mandate for me to keep alive the charism among the people, not only with the migrants but also with those who surround me, such as the government authorities, my laity collaborators and other religious persons.

It was not an easy job for me to stand and spread the truth among the migrants. Because in the field of migration, in particular, at the detention center, there were people who see the desperate migrants as their prey of gold and not persons in need. Easy money comes along with these poor and helpless migrants. The bloodsuckers distort the real juridical situation of the migrants and promise them freedom instantly. However, once they received the money they vanish in thin air. The penniless migrant then was abandoned in his or her own misery.

For this, the very presence of the church that is committed to be among the needy ones and to spread the Good News was unwelcome to the people who live their lives sucking the blood of every single migrant. There was a time that I was threatened verbally over the phone, by letters and emails by the people whose uncanny business was affected by our pastoral work. Nevertheless, that did not stop me. In fact, it gave me more reason to defend the defenseless migrants. Why fear, if my God is with me?

The life of our Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini has taught me to be bold in my missionary actions and not to remain silent at the existence of human violations and degradations. In addition, the apostolic zealotness of Father Joseph Marchetti and the untiring faith of Mother Assunta Marchetti in the divine providence is one of the paths I am following. I am not even a shadow in comparison with their lives. However, I am determined to follow their steps and fulfill the vows I proclaimed every single moment of my life.

¹ www.vicariadepastoral.org.mx.