

# Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

## September 2012

Taktse International School  
PO Box 90, Gangtok  
Sikkim, India 737101  
[www.taktse.org](http://www.taktse.org)

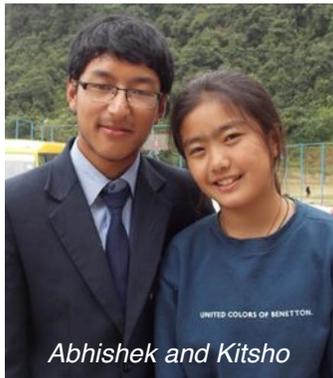
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*Thanks to the suggestion of Takashi and Sharlene Oyagi, two Taktse students, Kitsho Tenzin and Abhishek Subba, received scholarships to a summer youth leadership program at the International School of Asia, Karuizawa (ISAK) near Tokyo, Japan. They flew to Japan with two Tibetan students living in India. When they changed planes in Gonzhou, China, they had to make a tough choice.*

### Standing by New Friends

by Abhishek Subba, Grade 9

I presumed they were traveling to Japan to attend the same ISAK summer camp as Kitsho (grade 7) and I were—a girl younger than me, and a boy with an innocent face wearing big, square glasses. They stood out among the throng of impatient travelers in the Indira Ghandi Airport because they had no adults fussing over them. The boy gestured to Kitsho and me. They first attempted to talk to us in Tibetan, which neither of us understood. Kitsho then introduced herself in English. I smiled warmly, but just then I was distracted by the airline agent at the counter, who told us he could not give us our boarding passes without a letter of confirmation from ISAK. I was angry and confused. We hadn't even boarded our first flight and already our journey was going wrong! Luckily, our principal had not left yet. He talked to the airline agent, and we were allowed to proceed on our way.



After we passed through security, Kitsho and I had fun clicking photos, smiling at strangers, and walking backward in the Travelator. When we arrived at our gate, we found out that our Southern China Airlines flight had been delayed. We were stuck there for hours. The Tibetan students chatted with Kitsho. I was hungry and did not feel like talking, so I wandered around, keeping an eye on my companions.

We finally boarded our flight around midnight. This was my first trip outside India, and I was eager to board the plane. However, Kitsho insisted that we wait and board with the Tibetan students. Kitsho and I sat in our assigned seats and the Tibetans sat far behind us. The flight was long and uncomfortable. I could not sleep. I felt envious of Kitsho sleeping peacefully beside me.

We landed in Gonzhou, China the next morning. Sultry air enveloped us as we emerged from the plane and descended the steps to the tarmac. A man holding a sign that said “Narita International Airport, Tokyo, Japan,” stuck green tags on our bags. We waited for the Tibetans, who also got green tags, and then we followed the Narita man into the terminal. He seemed to be in a hurry.

We showed our passports at the immigration counter, and waited nervously as a Chinese official examined them. Kitsho and I were allowed to proceed through a metal gate, but the Tibetans were detained. There was some confusion. The immigration agent called his supervisor. A Chinese official told Kitsho and me in broken English to wait. I wondered what the problem could be. Tenzin, the Tibetan boy, and Kuensel, the Tibetan girl, had Indian passports like Kitsho's and mine, but ours were blue and theirs were yellow. Tenzin and Kuensel were taken away for interrogation, while Kitsho and I were placed in a waiting area, hemmed in by strap fences that made us feel like prisoners.

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After an hour or so, Tenzin emerged by himself. Holding back tears, Kitsho managed to ask, "What happened to Kuensel?"

"She has a photo of His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) and a Tibetan flag," Tenzin replied, rubbing his forehead. He was really agitated.

I exclaimed, "Aaee, because of that they are not letting her go? As if she will bomb China with the photo and the flag?"

Long minutes passed, and there was still no sign of Kuensel. Finally, the Narita man approached the three of us and said, "You go. Your flight leave in 20 minutes." As we pondered what to do, he added, "Go now or you miss your flight."

Tenzin asked the Narita man where Kuensel was. He replied that she was being detained. He said they would put her on a later flight.

I did not want to miss our flight, but Kitsho did not want to leave Kuensel behind. The troubled look on Tenzin's face finalized our decision. We firmly told the man that we would not leave without Kuensel.

The man then took away our passports and took us to a waiting lounge. We had no way to call ISAK to let them know we had missed our flight. We waited with increasing anxiety as hours dragged by. Tenzin told us that photos of His Holiness and Tibetan flags were contraband in China. I could not understand why such pictures were illegal, because Buddhism is venerated in Sikkim. In China, however, we were being detained because of the very thing we believe in most strongly.

Hours later, Kuensel was finally released. Several officers had interrogated her, and confiscated her pictures of His Holiness and her Tibetan flag. She glared resentfully at them with a tear-stained face and disheveled hair. We tried to comfort her, but she did not speak much. I was dismayed by Kuensel's ordeal. I never imagined that students could be subjected to such harsh treatment.

We were finally allowed to proceed on our trip, but at every subsequent check point, the Tibetans would be stopped, and I found myself praying that Tenzin and Kuensel would be allowed to pass. Even though we had only known each other for a short time, Kitsho and I had formed an unbreakable bond with our new Tibetan friends.

At last we boarded a flight to Tokyo, and we looked forward to contributing something at the ISAK summer school. We all felt a responsibility to represent our country with honor.

Throughout summer school, we grew very close to our Tibetan friends. We supported each other like brothers and sisters. Tenzin and Kuensel asked the staff at ISAK not to send them home through China, so when summer school ended, we could not fly home together. I miss them, and hope to see them again some day.



## **Keeping in Touch**

**- from an email to Principal Denjongpa  
by Linda Tobin**

*Linda Tobin has taken courses in children's literature, phonics and English as a Second Language. She has visited Taktse three times to tutor students in reading and conduct parent workshops. Check out her article in the June 2010 Taktse UPDATE at [www.Taktse.org](http://www.Taktse.org).*

Please pass along my fondest greetings to 'my' students. I remember the first few English words and sentences of Karma Tseten and Navraj, as well as so many of the other first graders who are now in 4th grade! Also, I wonder if any of the now 5th graders remember reading "Is Your Mama a Lama?" or hearing "Where the Wild Things Are" in second grade? Is it possible that Nitin is still there, now in 6th grade? I remember many, many more of the students. I hope that a couple of them remember me. They have had the opportunity to meet many wonderful teachers from the States and elsewhere.

It would be so much fun to hear from Karma Tseten, Navraj and others by email or 'snail' mail! I'd be happy to write them personal letters in return.



## **Tale of Despereaux Book Party**

by Reshma Thapa

*Every year the fifth graders read The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread, by Kate Dicamillo.*



Excitement for the book party had been building for months, and the day had finally arrived. None of my fifth graders seemed able to focus on the morning class. “When are we starting?” I was asked more

than once...even in the middle of a lesson. Normally, this kind of interruption would not have been acceptable, but today was special.

We started right after morning recess. The students had chosen their favourite characters, and worked hard on their costumes, and when they put them on, the class was suddenly filled with Despereaux, Miggery Sow, Princess Pea, Roscuro, Boticelli, King Phillip, and many others. I was struck by the ingenuity of their props; the needle and thread, Miggery Sow’s cauliflower ears, Despereaux’s tail, and Boticelli’s locket.

The students had memorized their characters’ lines, and frantically practiced them one last time before the other teachers came in. They also had to talk about why they had chosen their characters.



The students delivered their lines, some with confidence, and some less so, but they were all sincere and did their best. The audience, their classmates and teachers, had to guess which characters they were. After the performance, we wrote about and shared our favourite passages from the book.



It’s a tradition at Taktse to bring home-made food for class parties, and the moms worked as hard as their children for this party. Fried rice, chicken chili, French fries, alu puri, and a fabulous chocolate cake with “Despereaux” written on it were laid out on a table. The party ended with everyone moving towards the waiting food.

The fifth graders read The Tale of Despereaux as part of the ‘read along’ curriculum. For ten minutes every day at the beginning of reading workshop, the teacher reads aloud while the students read along in their own copies. The students are never more attentive than when being read to. At the end of each session, I was invariably met with groans of disappointment, and “Can we read one more page, please?” It always made my day to see them listening, spellbound.

Every session is followed by a discussion of the part that was read. A big part of the lesson consisted of having them analyse the characters, think about how they felt and why some characters acted the way they did. They found it hard to think about these questions; to look beyond the obvious, to think beyond the words on the page, and to connect the events and characters’ actions to their lives. I especially wanted them to appreciate Kate DiCamillo’s beautiful language. After weeks of probing, pushing and modeling, Bhutia and Tsedel, two very vocal girls, asked me one day, “Why didn’t Despereaux’s parents fight for their own son? He must have felt so betrayed!” Encouraged by the two bolder girls, the others opened up and shared their thoughts about why Despereaux’s parents acted the way they did. Some made sense and some didn’t, but what really mattered was that this simple comment by the two girls paved the way for the rest of the class to express themselves. I will never forget this comment by Mega, “Despereaux is a hero because even though he was scared of the rats, he fought his fears to save Princess Pea.”

My fifth graders lived Despereaux’s life for three months. They were amused by his silliness with Princess Pea, saddened by his family’s betrayal, scared when he was in the dungeon, and elated when he fought Roscuro. I will always remember how they applauded when the book ended...uplifted by Despereaux’s victory and relieved for the happy outcome. In Rheah’s words, “I was so worried he would die.”

We have moved on from Despereaux to Bridge to Terabithia, but I know my students still miss their brave mouse when they ask me to read the book a second time.



## Diversity at Taktse

by Ms. Bhawana Thapa, teacher

Diversity is a social studies project that we recently did in Grade 6. Students explored the differences among human beings in a fun-filled way. The students wrote about themselves and the things they like or dislike, and compared themselves with their classmates. Though all of them are in the same grade at the same school, we discovered that they come from different backgrounds and have a wide variety of interests and preferences. The students' favorite foods included mushroom pizza, spicy food, momos, rice,

*Diversity*  
In spite of being the same age, studying in the same school and class each one of us is different. These differences make us unique.

and ice cream. All the students are multi-lingual. Sikkimese, Hindi, Nepali, English, Bhutia, Subba, Manipuri, Thai, and Chinese are spoken by our students. Their interests include playing basketball, hanging out with friends, reading, singing, surfing the internet, and cycling.

As a result of this exercise, the students got a better appreciation of their classmates' diverse interests, languages and cultural backgrounds, and enhanced their sense of cooperation and community.



## Sixth Graders Explore Haiku

Green and sprinkled legs,  
Hop on logs and lily pad,  
Splash in cool water!

- **Karma Sadhwani**

Haiku softly sings,  
and a word picture is formed,  
a feast for the mind!

- **Yangchen Doma**

Today is windy,  
The leaves are swaying,  
beautifully in the wind.

- **Tsharanla Shangdarpa**

I stand on the field  
with fresh flowers and clean air  
New season; new me.

- **Yangchen Doma**





## Guilford College Partners with Taktse

by Heather Richardson Hayton, PhD

Chair of Guilford College English Department, and Director of Honors Program

Guilford College is excited to be partnering with Taktse on several projects. We are a selective, private, liberal arts college in North Carolina. Guilford was founded 175 years ago by the Quakers. Today our college remains driven by core Quaker values: a commitment to international diversity, promoting peace, enabling greater equality, protecting our environment, and striving for social justice in the world.

One of our catch-phrases at Guilford College is borrowed from Ghandi: "Be the change...." With thousands of volunteer hours performed by students each semester, we try to live that goal of making change in the world. Guilford has been named one of the top "socially conscious" schools in the USA, and was also one of 40 colleges nation-wide profiled in Colleges That Change Lives.

So partnering with Taktse is a natural fit. We were thrilled to welcome Taktse teachers to our college last January. They lived on campus, participated in courses, and observed at our two affiliated K-12 schools, New Garden Friends School and The Early College. We look forward to having more teachers visit this year, too!



I just completed my second trip to Sikkim, working with the Taktse board on strategic planning, and talking with the 10th graders about American colleges. Four of my colleagues, Professor Kathy Adams, Dr. Bobby Doolittle, and Professors Eric and Dasa Mortensen, joined me on this trip.

In July 2013, we plan on piloting a four-week Guilford College summer study-abroad program to Sikkim and Taktse. Ten students will spend time in Gangtok with Professor Hayton

learning about Sikkim, observing various educational models, staying with villagers in northern Sikkim, and building a playground at Taktse as their service project! We are grateful to work with Educorp Retreats and the Taktse board to make this happen.

This partnership serves both Guilford and Taktse students. The English Department is now offering Gilbert Award grants for Guilford students to intern at Taktse for up to six months. Through The Early College at Guilford, we are also trying to connect our Interact clubs for future projects.

The most exciting news is that several donors from Guilford built a scholarship fund this year called "The Lhomon Hope Fund" to support high-achieving students from Sikkim. We just awarded the first scholarship to Kunga Denzongpa, sister of Taktse ninth-grader, Songay. Kunga also won a prestigious President's Scholarship, and a Bonner Scholarship for community service. Guilford College looks forward to the first graduating class of Taktse 12th-graders, and we would love to have them join us, as well, for college in North Carolina!

*If you have questions about Guilford College, or the partnerships with Taktse, feel free to contact Professor Hayton by email at [hhayton@guilford.edu](mailto:hhayton@guilford.edu).*





## Great Himalayan Book Fest

by *Tenchung Namgyal, Grade 11*

On July 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, Taktse hosted the third annual Great Himalayan Book Fest, a joint venture with the renowned publishing house Scholastic India. Since

the size of the school has increased considerably, we had to split the Book Fest into a two-day affair; grades 6 and up on the 20<sup>th</sup>, and grades 5 and below on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The Book Fest took place in the AV Room, but there were several other activities such as table tennis and Wii that simultaneously took place in classrooms. As in previous years, the Business Studies group set up stalls. This year many hostellers set up additional stalls too. We also had musical performances along with book browsing. Something new this year was a flash mob organized by the hostellers. All the activities were very entertaining!



We got to meet Clifford, the big red dog in Norman Bridwell's famous series of children's books. We had a greater collection of books, and many new activities, including Legos and an iPad games center. The two-day event meant that parents did not have to stand in long lines as in earlier years. The stalls also offered many items for sale. For example, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade stall sold blankets and play dough, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade stalls sold brownies and other goodies, and the 11<sup>th</sup> grade stall sold roses and jute bags,

"Oh my god! Amazing!" was Sherab Jamtsho, a ninth grader's, reaction to the book fest. Mr. Raja, the computer

teacher, exclaimed, "I loved the energy and hard work everyone put in. It really paid off!"

All in all, everyone at Taktse, including parents, looks forward to the Great Himalayan Book Fest, and when it is as successful as it was this year, we begin wishing for it to come back the day after it ends.



"As I entered the book fair, I was stunned with the variety of books available."

- *Karma Sadhwani*

"At the book fair, we set up a stall where we sold many tucks (snacks). Customers came to our stall like wildfire. Within minutes, half our tucks were gone."

- *Tashi W. Gensapa*

"All in all, the Book Fest was **AWESOME!** I hope we have the Book Fest again with a whole new collection of books."

- *Tsharanla Shangdarpa*



## Planting Rice in Sajong

by Sagun Limboo, Grade 11

On July 22, the residential students and some of the day scholars went on the third annual rice planting trip to the village of Sajong. The trip was

organized by Mr. Lauenstein, the principal of Taktse, and Mr. Lok Babu, a Taktse board member whose family comes from Sajong.

We boarded the bus early in the morning with droopy eyes for the hour and half long trip. The older students were familiar with the trip, but it held a lot of surprises and excitement for the new ones. The bus picked up the day scholars at their respective stops and then made its way over the bumpy roads toward east Sikkim.

When we reached our destination, a lavish breakfast had been laid out for us. Then, after instructions were given, the boys entered the rice paddy to help the farmer plough the field. The younger boys who were ploughing the field for the first time in their lives were full of laughter. Almost knee deep in the soggy mud, they were really enjoying themselves, and some of them even started wrestling! The more patient girls entered the paddy next. Their job was to level the paddy so it would be easier to plant the rice seedlings. Traditionally, girls are not supposed to plough, but Taktse girls challenged this custom and requested permission to plough. With Mr. Lauenstein's help, consent was given and it was another snapshot to be captured—girls behind the oxen cheering their success with ploughing!



When it was finally time for planting, the ladies from Sajong showed us how to plant in rows. Everyone was having fun, but at the same time working really hard. It was a perfect mix of rigor and joy. This was a great experience for each of us to understand the value of rice, and to realize the hours of hard work under the hot sun that are required to produce a plateful of rice. No one wasted any food at lunch time!

It was really exciting to hear everyone share their experiences about planting rice. We all had so much to say and treasure. When it was time to leave, we genuinely thanked Mr. Lok Babu and his family for giving us the opportunity to make a connection with the land. It was awesome!

As we returned to school, everyone had one question on their minds: When is harvesting time?



*With only a few weeks of intensive training, three boys and three girls from Taktse competed in the inter-school table tennis tournament at Paljor Stadium in Gangtok on August 18-20. One of the girls, Yukta Subba, won a bronze medal.*



## **Table Tennis Tournament**

*by Lekpai Dhendup (grade 10)*

Going to the inter-school table tennis tournament, and watching and learning from more experienced competitors, was a new experience. I thought that I was pretty good at table tennis, especially since I had been chosen for the Taktse team. We practiced intensely for the tournament during the school hours, after school, and right up until bedtime, coached by Mr. Lauenstein.

I remember talking to my friends about how I was going to win the cup. That thought changed in a flash when we arrived at the tournament, and saw the other players practicing as if they were super-human. "This is going to be a long day," I thought. When I went to practice, the table seemed smaller than the one at Taktse, and my shots were missing. Our matches were scheduled at 2:00 p.m., so we had plenty of time for lunch. The United Sikkim first team happened to be training, so we ate quickly and came back to watch them. It was great to observe the idols of Sikkim.

When it was time for our matches, Ugay and Sherab went before me. They both played great, but unfortunately they lost. When the announcer called, "Lekpai Dhendup from Taktse," I went out with nothing to lose. I faced one of the players from the Table Tennis Academy. To my surprise, I actually won the first round, but the second round was a completely different story. In the end, I was defeated like my teammates.

Overall it was a great experience, one I won't forget. Hopefully we'll learn from it, and provide a tougher challenge for other players in future tournaments.



*I was scared, but at the same time excited. My opponent was from Kalimpong in West Bengal. I had never played against outsiders, so it was quite tough for me, but I gave my level best, and ultimately won a bronze medal. I am happy and proud to win a medal for my school.*

*– Yukta Subba, grade 6*

## **A Shared Vision for a Sustainable Future**

Taktse is proud to partner with Sungevity to promote clean solar power for a healthier environment. Sign up for Sungevity's solar energy lease program and they will donate **\$750** to Taktse. Plus, you'll receive a **\$750** American Express gift card and a **free iPad!**

Click [HERE](#) to get a free iQuote!



*The Taktse UPDATE newsletter is edited by Lonnie Friedman and Paul Lauenstein.*

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