Meeting of European Friendship Societies
The VII Meeting of European Societies was held in Bhutan from November 27 – December 1, 2012. 36 delegates from ten European societies and two non-government organisations had the unique chance to follow the generous invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Marianne Frei, Rosmarie Frey and Julia Menk represented the SSB board. The delegates were briefed on recent developments in Bhutan by Prime Minister Lyonchhen Jigme Y. Thinley, by the Minister of Economic Affairs Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk and by the Tourism Council of Bhutan. Meetings were arranged with Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and with representatives of several Civil Society Organizations. There was time for sharing and for sightseeing in Thimphu as well. During the second week of the conference, interested delegates were invited to visit Punakha, Phobjikha and Paro. On December 7, we were most honoured that Their Majesties the King and the Queen of Bhutan granted an audience to the delegates of the European Friendship Societies at Tashi-chho Dzong.

From now on, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will publish on its website the profile, the domains of interest and the recent activities of the friendship associations. The societies are invited to send their updated reports by the end of November every year.

After a joint board meeting with lively discussions about activities planned for 2013, our sister organisation BSS kindly hosted a dinner for our delegation.

SSB Excursion to Gruyères
On September 15, this year’s excursion took us to the Tibet Museum in Gruyères. 16 members followed the invitation and enjoyed a very interesting visit of the museum guided by the founder Mr. Alain Bordier himself. Over a delicious lunch, new and old friendships were established and refreshed.

Many thanks to Fabienne Grossenbacher and Rosmarie Burri who organised the event. The board is very interested to receive suggestions for next year.

Obwald Volkskulturfest
In July, many members of the Society visited and enjoyed the Obwald Festival, where the monks of the central monastic body from Punakha Dzong contributed their sacred music and chants. A very special and unforgettable event in 2012!

New books by Kunzang Choden
On November 30th, two new books by Kunzang Choden were launched: «Ogyen Cho-ling – A Manor in Central Bhutan», with texts from Kunzang Choden, Françoise Pommaret and architectural drawings by Pierre Pichard; and «Membar Tsho – the Flaming Lake», a comic book written by Kunzang Choden and
Welcome to the new Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bhutan in Geneva, H.E. Dasho Daw Penjo

By Werner Külling, Member of the Board

In July 2012, H.E. Dasho Daw Penjo succeeded his predecessor, Mr. Yeshey Dorji, as the new Ambassador of Bhutan designate to Switzerland, Austria and Norway, as well as Permanent Representative to the United Nation Office in Geneva.

The Society Switzerland-Bhutan, SSB, welcomes him and his family and wishes him full satisfaction in his new assignment and a happy life in our country. We are looking forward to meeting him once during the General Assembly or another event of the SSB in the coming years.

Dasho Daw Penjo, born 1958 in Norbang, Punakha, married to Ms Daw Zam and father of three children, is a career diplomat of the Royal Government of Bhutan. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thimphu in March 1980 as Private Secretary of the then Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dawa Tshering. He served the Foreign Ministry in Thimpu in different functions, such as the Director of the Departments of Bilateral and Multilateral Affairs. Most of his time he worked abroad in the Royal Bhutanese Embassies in New Delhi, Dhaka and Geneva as Secretary and Deputy Chief of Missions. From 2003 – 2008, he was Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York and first non-resident Ambassador to Canada. In 2009, he was appointed Foreign Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Thimphu, where he was in charge until his second assignment to the Embassy in Geneva.

Ambassador Dasho Daw Penjo is a very good friend of Switzerland, and we are convinced that he will contribute his very best to maintain and intensify the excellent and longstanding relations between the two countries. Tashi Delek!
Upcoming events 2013

SSB General Assembly
Saturday, March 23, 2013
All registered members will receive a personal information with all the details in February. Please hold the date in the meantime.
We are looking forward to seeing you there!

New SSB Members
By Julia Menk, Member of the Board
Bhutan has obviously got a magnetic force acting well beyond its own borders. People from everywhere not only want to go there to get inspired by Bhutanese culture and philosophy of life, but they are also looking around here to find a connection to the Land of the Thunder Dragon. Thus, in the last 6 months, again 15 new members have subscribed to the Society, to keep in touch with the fascinating Kingdom in the Himalayas:
• Jacques F. Bischoff, Zürich
• Subhankar & Margrith Sengupta, Zürich
• Ruth & Hans Strassmann, Feldmeilen
• Stephen B. & Marianna Suter-Mosca, Zürich
• Katherina Washington, Zürich
• Christoph Weber-Berg, Staufen
• Silvia Hansel Scarpa, Freienwil
• Regula & Kaspar Mettler, Wangen SZ
• Jörg Nagel, Kilchberg
• Adelheid Schenitz-Keller, Birmensdorf
• Ulrich Stückelberger, Zürich
The General Assembly on March 23, 2013, is the next occasion to meet and to share our experiences and projects. The Society Board is looking very much forward to meeting the new members, meanwhile wishing you all the best and a merry wintertime. Tashi delek!

Visitors from Bhutan in Switzerland

Investing in the Nuns to be the «Agents of Social Change» in Bhutan
By Otto Stern
Presentation by Dr. Tashi Zangmo, Director of the Bhutan Nuns Foundation on 06.11.2012, at Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich
The Bhutan Nuns Foundation (BNF) is a non-profit organization founded in 2009 under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuck. Dr. Tashi Zangmo is the founder of BNF. Her childhood experience inspired her to champion the cause of underprivileged women and girls through educating Buddhist Nuns in Bhutan. The mission of BNF is to improve the basic living conditions of every Nunnery in Bhutan and provide adequate learning opportunities for the young nuns. (For information about the BNF see www.bhutannuns.org. More on Dr. Tashi Zangmo below, p. 13 of the Newsletter).
In her informative lecture, with a catching touch of humour, Tashi presented the Foundation as a “troublemaker” trying to raise public attention on the nuns as an “unintentionally neglected group of the Bhutanese society”.
The aim is to uplift the education and the very poor living conditions: out of 26 nunneries in Bhutan only 3 or 4
have some kind of a curriculum and qualified teachers. The rest is located in far-flung areas where they get any attention, and even have to worry about their shelter.

In a video-clip, taken with her own camera during visits and monitoring tours, she presented some of the ongoing activities of the Foundation, like building toilets, bathrooms and classrooms, getting drinking water etc. “First we had started training programs in health and hygiene education and on nutrition, but soon we realized that it doesn’t make sense to talk about hygiene, when there are no proper facilities; or to talk about nutrition, when you don’t have enough to eat!”

After working for 3 years, doing many different small projects, she now feels the need to develop and construct a Training Centre, in order to really do something for all the nuns throughout the country. To this end the Foundation got already the necessary land from the Government at the outskirts of Thimphu. The first step towards this “long term dream” is to collect the necessary money for the construction and the establishment of a Training-cum-Resource Center for the Bhutanese Nuns. To do this “also small contributions are most welcome!” (more information www.bhutannuns.org)

After the video clip she stressed again the essential mission of BNF: “To train the nuns to be socially engaged, rather then isolating themselves; to get skills to reach out to the larger society, to women and children especially as teachers, health workers, doctors and counsellors. The first nun has just started her class of medical studies, and we will have the first lady doctor in 5 years from now!”

Most important is to give basic education, so the young nuns can make decisions on their own for their further training and engagement. Education is the key to liberation. A few bigger nunneries now have a school and teachers. So our effort is starting to bear fruit. But now we need an extension of the education possibilities, so they can get into the official training system, and become teachers, health workers, doctors of their own nunneries. This is why we need a centralised Training and Resource Centre.

See also in the archive 2009 of the Mount Holyoke College Alumnae quarterly: http://alumnae.mtholyoke.edu/wp/mhaq/2009/04/ “Humble Crusader: Tashi Zangmo Promotes Female Education in Bhutan”

“Yes, we did it!”

Three Bhutanese Graduates from Swiss sponsored Hotel Middle Management Program

By Urs Dürsteler

What an encouraging success story! The second batch, namely 25 Graduates, 14 males and 11 females, successfully completed an eight month Hotel Management Training Program in Thimphu and finally graduated in December 2012 with a Swiss «Diploma of advanced Studies in Hotel Management». The diploma was issued by HWZ University of applied Sciences Zurich and endorsed by the Royal Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (RITH). Both institutions conducted in close cooperation a challenging dual program over...
a period of two years during the off-season of tourism. Substantial financial contributions to the program were provided by Jacobs Foundation and Elysium Foundation, both in Switzerland.

In the meantime the three toppers of this batch, namely Tenzin Norbu (1st place), Rinzin Lhamo (2nd place), and Jigme Nidup (3rd place), are currently attending an internship in the Hotel Belvedere in Scuol GR. Kurt Baumgartner, owner of the hotel and also a lecturer in the program, developed a tailor-made program to enhance the various professional and managerial skills of the three Bhutanese. “We are so excited about this experience and want to learn as much as we can!” was the common motto of the three Bhutanese. The internship will last up to the end of February 2012, and will add some Bhutanese charm and flavour to the hotel Belvedere, an excellent 4-star hotel in the lower Engadina valley.

Activities by SSB

A Swiss Stirring Equipment for the Cheese Factory in Gogona
By Werner Külling, Member of the Board

Gogona, a pretty valley high up in the hills of the Wangdiphodrang District can be considered as the „birth place“ of the Swiss development cooperation with the Kingdom of Bhutan. It was in Gogona where the first Swiss rural development project was started by the then „Foundation pro Bhutan“ of Mr Fritz von Schulteiss, with the advice and support of the third King of Druk Yul, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who opened the country from splendid isolation slowly but steadily for development and modernisation in the fields of agriculture, education, infrastructure and governance.

Swiss development pioneers like Fritz Maurer, Ernst Meister and Walter Roder started first activities in Gogona in the 1970ies, in collaboration with the Departments of Agriculture and Livestock of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Improvements of pastures for better fodder production and of the local cattle were necessary to increase the milk yield. Dairy development projects always made the start of Swiss development projects, be it in Nepal or in Latin America, and also in Bhutan, in Gogona, where a small mountain cheese factory was built. The Gogona engagement was completed about ten years later and the programmes handed over to the Government and the local population. But contacts of the Swiss were never stopped and the cheese plant still got technical and managerial advice of the food technologist Fritz Maurer and financially by HELVETAS.

Chief of RB Police visits Zurich
Mr. Kipchu Namgyel, Chief of Royal Bhutan Police, visited Zurich in November together with his delegation to discuss a possible cooperation with Regierungsrat Mario Fehr, Vorsteher der Sicherheitsdirektion des Kt. Zürich.
Since quite some time the MPU Gogona is managed by a female cheese-maker, Ms Chimi, who is supported by her husband Sherab, a teacher, and a local assistant. In the monsoon time, they collect about 200 litres of milk from the local farmers and produce a considerable amount of cheese. The marketing is done by the MPE in Bumthang. To modernise the production and make the heavy work of Chimi and her helper easier, we (SSB) purchased a stirring equipment (Rührwerk für das Käsekessi) in Switzerland, which was installed. The stirring equipment provides excellent services in the MPU. Chimi and the Gogona people are very happy about the improvement and very grateful to the SSB members for the donation equivalent to about 3’000 Swiss francs.

SSB support made big difference to the students of Zhemgang

By Julia Menk, Member of the Board

The SSB board received a couple of letters from the school project in Zhemgang, thanking us for the financial support; actually this gratitude should be addressed to our members. That is why we would like to pass it on to you through this newsletter.

Facts and focuses of the project:

The project series started in 2010, when SSB approved an education project proposal to support the Tradijong Community Primary School with school uniforms (see newsletter of December 2011).

Since then the Barpong Community Primary School could also benefit from this project. Both schools are located in Zhemgang, one of the financially poorest Dzongkhags in Bhutan.

School uniforms: As the income of the farmers in that region is so low, most of the parents are not able to afford the mandatory school uniform. That is why they do not send their children to school. By offering proper school uniforms to the students, the parents got an important financial relieve and could effectively enrol their children in school.

Water filters: The project focuses also on supplying drinking water to the school, as the water source is located one hour of walk from the school, and the water quality is not good enough, especially during monsoon. After the installation of 4 water filters the students are less annoyed by water-borne diseases. Thus, they are less concerned with running to the toilet but rather concentrated on learning.

Besides providing gardening equipment improving the quality of gardening, hence more and better vegetables, the project made it also possible to install solar lighting facilities and an adapted IT-infrastructure, so that the pupils can also attend computer lessons, or do homework even after sunset.

The school project in Zhemgang is scheduled for three years, and each year one new school will benefit from this project.

As Sonam Wangdi (Associate Dzongkhag Education Officer) nicely wrote in his letter: “The school has now clean drinking water, ICT facilities, solar lighting facilities, clean environment, improved school agriculture programme and above all, smart students in beautiful school uniforms that your project has supplied."

We are pleased to see that the project is resulting in so much happiness, and are looking forward to continue the projects on behalf of our society members. So, thanks to all of you for being part of this project. Tashi delek!
**Activities of SSB Members**

*One hospital for almost 20'000 people and still...*

*By Kaspar Mettler*

There is no such thing as a general practitioner or family doctor in Bhutan. Nevertheless, the Bhutanese population does visit the doctor – however, at the hospital. For the people in the district of Bumthang the probability of being taken care of by Dr. Regula Mettler, medical specialist for general internal medicine FMH, is quite high. The doctor from canton Schwyz has been working at the hospital in Jakar/Bumthang since September 2012 on behalf of the SHMSC (see newsletter June 2012).

Basic medical care in Bhutan is financed by the state and is, therefore, free of charge for everybody. Almost 20'000 people live in Jakar within the district of Bumthang - which is as big as the cantons Zurich and Schwyz together – where they share one single hospital with approximately twenty beds. In addition, each of the four Ge-wogs Chumey, Tang, Ura and Choekhor have one Basic Health Unit (BHU).

The first place to go in case of sickness or injury is the BHU. The equipment there is extremely simple: there is no laboratory, nor X-ray apparatus. Correspondingly, there is also no doctor but only Health Assistants. The BHU predominantly deals with surgical dressing, maternity care and vaccinations.

In case the BHU reaches its limit, the patient has to set off for the hospital. Depending on location and weather, the journey can take several hours. However, many people also go directly to the Wangdichoeling Hospital in Bumthang without having been sent by a doctor – after all, there is none...

In fact the Wangdichoeling Hospital in Bumthang is a large medical practice in which almost 95% of the patients are treated ambulant. On the first floor of the main building there are approximately 20 additional beds, where patients are treated as in-patients (births, critical illnesses such as tuberculosis, typhoid fever, anemia, etc., heavy injuries and fractures which don't have to be operated and emergencies).

The Mother-and-Child-Clinic (officially RHU, Reproductive Health Unit) is in a separate building within the hospital compound. The daily work comprises contraception advice and pregnancy care, vaccination programs for mother and child, as well as baby and infant care. However, the actual delivery of the babies occurs at the hospital under the direction of competent general nurses. The profession 'midwife' does not exist in the public health sector of Bhutan. A doctor is only consulted in case of severe complications. In fact, a large number of births are still performed at home where the knowledge has been passed on throughout generations.

The health centre Bumthang is equipped with the most important devices: X-ray apparatus, medical ultrasonic and ECG devices, a laboratory and a pharmacy. Due to the acute shortage of doctors in Bhutan there is only one official doctor at the Bumthang hospital, who is supported by a Health Assistant and three technicians (for X-rays and ultrasonic sound, dental care and ENT).

Apart from this there is also a doctor who treats patients according to traditional Bhutanese medical practice.
For surgical matters (cesareans, appendices, severe injuries, etc.) patients have to be transferred to neighbouring Mongar. Neighbouring meaning: Mongar is 200 kilometres away and the journey, on partially poor roads, takes at least six hours, leading over the highest pass of Bhutan accessible for vehicles, the Thrumshing La (3'780 metres above sea-level). On this rollercoaster-journey – literally - man and machine tackle about 4'000 metres in altitude difference. If a patient has to be transferred to Thimphu to the biggest hospital of the country, the journey takes approximately nine hours.

Waiting for a treatment

By now Dr. Regula Mettler has become well accustomed to the situation within the Bhutanese health sector. Her experience of 20 years as an independent general practitioner in a countryside medical practice in canton Schwyz has proven to be an immense benefit. Strong nerves, patience and a clear view are important. However, surprises come up every now and then:

- Before starting any classical medical treatment, family members wait in the corridor of the hospital for quite a long time in order to see if the puja – a religious ritual that they perform in advance and in which they ask the Gods for the patient's recovery – has had an impact.
- A Belgian tourist has to be transferred to Thimphu; her insurance requires the patient to be flown from the airfield Bumthang to Paro/Thimphu and absolutely refuses to believe that no planes can (yet) take-off or land in Bumthang.
- After a tiring meeting there is an invitation to tea in one of the small shops on the way home. Is it a coincidence that the doctor has to take a closer look into the eyes of the shop-owner and his wife?
- There is also no shortage of humor. After a long journey to Thimphu or Mongar, the drivers of the ambulance usually sleep at the Japan Guest House. In response to the question where this lodging may be, a hearty laughter is heard. In fact, they sleep in the ambulance. These are Japanese vehicles supplied by Japan!

Activities of SSB Members

“I like to speak!”

By Daniela Garaventa and Véronique Wegmann

Report of two Swiss speech therapists in the Deaf Education Unit of Drukgyel Lower Secondary School, Paro

I will never forget the moment, when I, Daniela, was sitting in the classroom of Chencho Om in September 2011. Wangdy was standing in front of the blackboard reading the sentence with a loud and perfectly understandable voice: „I am a boy!“ Chencho Om, one of the teachers in the Deaf Unit of Drukgyel Lower Secondary School was working after her ordinary timetable with students in her special „speech class“. Most of the children were wearing at least one hearing aid and they were reading sentences from the blackboard.

After my impressions in March 2011 when I entered the school for the first time, I would never have thought that such a progress could be possible: no voices, no sound at all. Around 60 students from all over Bhutan are integrated into the Drukgyel Lower Secondary School in Paro, where they get a very good education through dedicated staff, teaching all the subjects in sign language, a sign language deve-
I lived in the same school. I was very impressed by the immense effort for the hearing impaired children and students aged between 5 and 26.

With the introduction of “Education for All” and with the signing of the UN convention on the Rights of Children with disability, Bhutan government started introducing schools for disabled children. The first school in the country for students with disability was introduced in 1973, but it caters to the needs of visually impaired children only. Since then, few regular schools have been introduced, where also students with other disabilities are being integrated, one of them is Drukgyel Lower Secondary School in Paro. Due to the language barrier, the integration did not work with the deaf students. Therefore a separate unit was established, the Deaf Education Unit.

Thanks to the effort of Fritz Loppacher, a former employee of Helvetas who had been working in Bhutan in earlier days, I could go to the Himalayan Kingdom. I was planning a two-month volunteering internship abroad during my further education program (Intensivweiterbildung der Pädagogischen Hochschule Zürich), and I asked Fritz to help me find a work place for two months in Bhutan. Through his contacts to YDF, the Bhutan Youth Development Fund, I was asked to work in Drukgyel as a speech therapist. I have been a speech therapist for over twenty years, with a long experience of working also in international schools for 5 to 16 year-old children, but I felt I wasn’t prepared enough for providing successful therapy to hearing impaired children. So I looked for a speech therapist in the Zentrum für Gehör und Sprache, Zurich, a big school for hearing impaired children, and indeed Véronique Wegmann was the perfect person I could find for my very short briefing before departing to Bhutan. She helped me with a lot of ideas and material. When I left, she told me: „If you need any help, write me an e-mail or maybe I will also come to Bhutan“. Full of enthusiasm for the work to be done and eager to use all my knowledge, books, pictures and working papers, I arrived in Paro in March 2011. Luckily I met Katharina Prager, a volunteer from Germany, who had just arrived and was sent to the school with the same intention: to make the hearing impaired speak.

So, first step, we thought, let’s check the files about the hearing tests and see who would be able to speak, if they had a good hearing aid. The children are being checked only twice a year by an audiologist from Thimphu. There were not many files we could find and the children often did not wear their hearing aids, because nobody could adjust them. But we found an audiometer, so Katharina and I started with testing the hearing and speech ability of each child. At the end all had proper files with all the details. We went to the classes, worked with the children and the teacher. Our central goal was to make everybody aware of the importance of not exclusively use sign language.

If you want to make children speak, you have to use your own voice, and to give students the opportunity to use their voices to develop a spoken language.

In the meantime Véronique had quit her job in Zurich and planed her volunteer trip to Bhutan. She continued our work in Drukgyel for another seven weeks.

Another seven weeks passing by too fast! Too fast for when I, Véronique, think about all the ideas Daniela, Katharina and I had developed and shared.

When I arrived in Drukgyel I was very happy to meet Daniela and Katharina and to have the opportunity to discuss and review the situation together. We also worked out the next expedient steps together before Katharina and Daniela left.

First of all I distributed and adapted the hearing aids I brought from Switzerland with the
help of an audiologist from the Thimphu Hospital.

I made it clear that there is no sense in keeping the batteries in the cupboard, thinking that they would be so precious. The batteries should be available to the children at any time, otherwise they can’t use their hearing aids and make no progress, and the batteries will expire after some time anyway. The handling and cleaning of hearing aids also was shown to the teachers and students.

To wear a hearing aid is not synonymous with the ability of hearing and understanding. In order to increase the benefit of the hearing aids for the children, the teachers were also taught how auditory training can develop the hearing-sense. Instructing the teachers made up the largest part of my work. Once a week, through workshops, I introduced different topics, and then, during the following week, we adopted this new knowledge in the classroom together.

Further, I worked with the children individually and in groups, always in the presence of a teacher, so they could see what deaf children can achieve. When we explained that in Switzerland almost all hearing-impaired persons can communicate in spoken language, they could hardly believe it. In their experience deafness and dumbness was same, and the children were hardly capable of being educated in schools. Only when the first children produced their first phonemes, they noted with astonishment that their children are able to learn the spoken language.

In addition to the handling of the hearing aids, the auditory training and the acquisition of spoken language, also much importance was placed on lip reading. Because until now Bhutan has no deaf community of its own, a deaf child is living and communicating in a hearing environment. For this reason it is very important that the children learn from an early age the spoken language, including lip reading and other communication strategies. With this communication skills the child will be able to live independent in this hearing world. If the hearing-impaired persons only communicate with sign language, they will depend on their familiar environment for all their life. That’s what we I try to avoid with our work.

In kindergarten, or better already in preschool, these principles should prevail in working with these children. In the kindergarten of Drukgyel the children repeated the words the teacher prompted or they filled in worksheets, what is not appropriate for their age and knowledge.

Together with a teacher, we introduced communication rituals and played a lot of games that facilitated to crack the language code and learn new words. But I quickly realized that this kind of lessons only succeeded with me present, as these teaching methods and contents seemed too weird to the teachers. Again, it would make sense if a speech therapist could work directly with the teacher in the classroom.

Luckily, one kind of collaboration is still going on: we stay in contact by mail and skype with Chencho Om. So, we can share ideas, and she can ask questions and get suggestions for her speech class.

I, Daniela, returned to Bhutan in autumn 2011 to see how sustainable all our efforts had been. This time I worked for 7 weeks as a volunteer speech therapist in Changangkha School in Thimphu, another school for special education.

In January 2012 Katharina, Véronique and I organized a further education trip for Chencho Om to Switzerland and Germany. Chencho Om visited many schools and met with hearing impaired children. She also attended a workshop on Inclusive Education and International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) in Zurich and returned to Bhutan with many ideas for the future special education in hearing and speech.

We all were very happy when we could see, in the BBS production „My world“, the young hearing impaired student Prakash telling one of his favourite things by sign language: “I like to speak!” To make this wish come true for many of the hearing impaired children, and to give every child the possibility to be integrated
into the (hearing) society, to live an independent life what ever the handicap is, we could see a lot of effort in Bhutan. But we also could see what more should be done.

We have tried our best in many different ways since we stepped into the special education field in Bhutan. We were networking with different organisations, had an appointment with the Minster of Education, started cooperation with hotels, brought batteries and material for the hearing aids to Bhutan, and are still trying to find more support.

The unit in Drukgyel urgently needs an audiologist for frequent check-ups for the effective inclusion of deaf students into the regular school. The audiologist could use the material for making ear moulds that were donated by a company from Switzerland for a better fitting of the hearing aid.

This summer for the first time some hearing impaired students could work during an internship in Zhiwa Ling Hotel in Paro. For job internship programs of deaf adults more hotels, businesses and companies have to be identified, who are willing to accept the hearing impaired students for about one month of training during each academic session. Accordingly those businesses will get to know the abilities of the students helping for employment in future.

Hopefully there will be further successes on the way to Wangdy’s and Prakash’s innermost wish: "I like to speak!"

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Meeting Point

Gyamtsho Tshering, student at HWZ Zurich
by Otto Stern

The following interview presents a young Bhutanese, Gyamtsho Tshering (21) from the family of Nob Gyeltshen in Thimphu. He is a student at the Hochschule für Wirtschaft (HWZ) in Zürich. Before, he studied in India, Darjeeling, up to class 12, where he had chosen courses in humanities. After class 12 he had a year’s break and did part time jobs, mostly internship, to get job experience. He worked in Jumolhary Hotel where he did all the different jobs from the kitchen, to cleaning staff, and front desk. Two jobs were in Bhutan newspaper houses, one in Dzongkha and one in English.

OSt: Why did you choose to study in Switzerland?

Gyamtsho: Actually, when I finished graduation I wanted to go for a career in psychology, criminal or child psychology, or political science and sociology. So I was looking for colleges to study, and I applied everywhere. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, I had the opportunity to study business administration. And so, by talking with my family, especially with my father, and considering the situation in Bhutan – the growing economy and banks flourishing – I thought this seems to be a good choice. And where not better to study than in Switzerland, where everything is in order, where two o’clock means 2:00, where all the money of the world is running through Swiss banks, where the currency is so strong and the culture so rich. I thought, why not study here and take back to Bhutan what I can. Then, with the great help of Prof. Urs Dürsteler I was very lucky to get into HWZ.
**OST:** What are you studying?

**Gyamtsho:** Here at HWZ I’m doing a Bachelor in Business Administration, BBA. For now the subjects are mostly general; we have maths, accounting, IT, Swiss business law; and also minor subjects like presentation technology or academic writing, and of course English and German.

**OST:** Where do you live here in Switzerland?

**Gyamtsho:** In Winterthur, I stay in Prof. Dürsteler’s house, downstairs there is a bedroom, an attached kitchen and a toilet. For a student this is really perfect, a great chance, and all for free! But on Saturdays and Sundays when I stay at home in Winterthur, sometimes it gets very lonely. My friends don’t live in Winterthur, they all live in Zurich. So now, to find a bit more of a student atmosphere, I’m looking for a WG (a flat where students share rooms) I could pay with my own money. It would be nice to live in Zurich, but there it’s very expensive!

**OST:** How do you manage with the language?

**Gyamtsho:** Before coming to Switzerland in September 2011, I studied German for two months in Germany, and the college here also offers German, so I’m doing quite well by now. At first I couldn’t understand Swiss German at all, but now it is getting better too. The classes at HWZ are all in English, so, studying I have no language problems, but I might have some with my work.

**OST:** So, you are not only studying, but also working?

**Gyamtsho:** When I arrived here, I started working in restaurants as a waiter, and there the costumers talked to me in Swiss German. But now I understand also a little Swiss German, and I get along quite well. If I know the words I try to answer in Swiss German, otherwise always in German. Now I’m working with the company Nexus AG in Winterthur (www.nexus.ch), and there the language is English. Nexus is a business incubator, they help to start a business, and at this time they are expanding to the Asian market. So, they need people from different countries to do research in target countries, and one of those countries is India. I am not an Indian native, but – since I spent a good part of my childhood and schooling in India – I know India quite well, and I speak Hindi. So I qualified for doing market research and analysis for India, to see whether a company can start up something in India.

**OST:** And this means working on the computer?

**Gyamtsho:** Yes, too much on the computer actually! But, if a project goes well, and if they do have a start-up company, they might well send me to India to work on the ground.

**OST:** In your studies here, what is your centre of interest?

**Gyamtsho:** I’d say, it has to do with numbers, for example maths; I was interested in maths in class 10, but then I was distracted, I liked basketball! I didn’t think of my future, I just took the easy part, I didn’t choose maths or science, I ended up with psychology. Now, if I could go back, I’d take maths for sure!

**OST:** Were you able to catch up with maths for your studies here?

**Gyamtsho:** Yes, the first semester was quite bad, but the second semester was good; now I’m in the third semester, and classes seem going well; tests are coming up soon and I hope to do well. Soon, we will have to choose our courses for the forth semester, and most of my colleagues are going for banking and finance; I’m still thinking, but it’s quite sure I’m going for general management; it has to be something with humans, with social contact, like hotel management for example; so, for now, it’s quite sure I’m choosing general management.

**OST:** How is life in Switzerland?

**Gyamtsho:** It’s very different from home; here I don’t have so many friends; those I have here are also working, so it’s not just college or university life. Apart from that, life here is very organized, everything is set, and you don’t live as relaxed as you would like to. But it is great to be active here; it’s a beautiful place where everything works fine, actually where everything works perfect! That’s really nice.

**OST:** What is your normal daily schedule? Do you start early?

**Gyamtsho:** Oh yes, if it’s a busy day, actually I could get up at seven, but I like it very slowly in the morning, so I get up at six, have breakfast, and then, if it’s for work, I get there at seven forty-five. I start at eight; I work the whole day, then, I take the train from Winterthur to Zurich for evening classes; they finish at nine thirty, then, I go back home. Sometimes my friends don’t understand why I don’t stay with them for a beer; but they live in a family where everything is prepared, and I have to cook for myself, do the shopping etc. If I stay out with them then it gets late, eleven thirty or later, and I get very tired, and at home there is no food!

**OST:** How is your cooking? Bhutanese?

**Gyamtsho:** At first, when I came here, it was hard, I didn’t know how to cook properly, so my mom got on the laptop teaching me. On Skype I showed her the stuff I had bought and I asked...
her how to cook it! By now, I find everything I like, except chilly. The chilly you get here, you eat it like a vegetable!

OST: And what are you doing in your free time?
Gyamtsho: I play basketball; for a while I played with the Winterthur Basketball Club, but now with studies and work it's too much, it just doesn't go together. But every Friday in Winterthur there is a place where university students are playing together; so I go there to keep fit.

OST: Are you travelling around in the country?
Gyamtsho: Till now, not so much; I've been in Bern, Geneva and Luzern. But now that I have a job – and I hope it's going to last – I'm able to save some money, so I can do some trips with my friends. What I love here is that people my age or even younger have the opportunity to study and work at the same time. Then you can save money and go for a vacation with your friends; and your parents can't say anything, it's your own money! At the basketball club, when I heard a 16 years old saying "I'm working, I'm doing my apprenticeship and I'm studying", it sounded incredible to me! It would be wonderful if we had that opportunity in Bhutan. In Bhutan, in India, we have graduates after graduates, and it's extremely difficult to get in a job; but here, you are a graduate, but you have already job experience, that's a plus point!

OST: What would you like to do, if you had more time and money of your own?
Gyamtsho: Travel, for sure, see more of Europe! First I would go to Greece; then I'd like to see the city of Rome, the Colosseum, where the battles between the gladiators took place. Maybe Paris, if I could go there with my friends, why not. Everybody is talking about fashion in connection with Paris; it would be nice to see the French side of the world also. And then Berlin; I was there for only one day, and it is not enough!

OST: What do you find rather difficult in Switzerland?
Gyamtsho: I'm a very open person, I like to talk here and there, to everybody, and so, because I can't speak Swiss German so well, with my language limits it doesn't always work so well. I meet many people who speak English very well, but also many people are shy to speak in English, so I often have this limited contact with people. And also people aren't so open here, they prefer to stay in their group, and this makes it difficult to get in contact.

OST: How long do you plan to stay here?
Gyamtsho: Up to the Bachelor degree it will take me about another 3 years.
OST: So, by then you will be very fluent even in Swiss German!
Gyamtsho: (laughing) hoffentlich!
OST: Thank you for the interview!

Meeting Point
Tashi Zangmo,
Director of Bhutan Nuns Foundation
By Otto Stern
During her visit in Zürich for the presentation of the Bhutan Nuns Foundation (see above, p. 3), I had a chance to meet Dr. Tashi Zangmo and to get a glimpse of her extraordinary journey from a remote village in eastern Bhutan to a PhD in America and the foundation of an organization that will have an impact on Bhutanese society.

OST: Where do you come from?
Tashi: I'm coming from a village near Wamrong (Tashigang), a very remote area where around 1973 nobody went to school, especially girls. I was the first girl from my community sent to the only school in Wamrong, and I was already eleven years old.

Out of 150 students there were only 5 girls, all
daughters of teachers and local shopkeepers. Since it takes a whole day to walk from my village to Wamrong, I was sent for boarding. All of the teachers were South Indians, only one Bhutanese language teacher, and they were neither passionate nor compassionate teachers; they were there only for job, constantly scolding and hitting children. I stayed in that school up to grade 6, then I wanted to leave the school, because I really hated it, there was not a single day I liked that school. My mother used to come to see me once a month, and I used to cry the whole time. My mother and me had the hardest time; she used to tell me "by sending you to school, I’m letting grow a bone into my heart!" Meaning "I’m trying to be very tough".

At home we were 8 brothers and sisters, 6 girls and 2 boys, and me and my youngest sister were the only ones going to school. I always say it was a narrow escape; only one in a million can get it! I could have dropped out of school, I could have got married in the village, whatever.

From the school in Wamrong I went to Thimphu for high school. One of my brothers in law was able to give me a little support to stay in a boarding school, my parents didn’t have any cash at all, and during vacation I always got a temporary job in offices to support myself. When I finished, I didn’t go to college. I was looking for a job, because I wanted to help my family. First I did two years of training, where I also learned short hand stenography. Then, during the winter vacation, I got to work in the Planning Commission as a typist, and they asked me to come back after finishing the training. So, for 4 years I worked in the administration as a secretary and typist. But something kept telling me, this is not really what I want to do, I can do more than this. I could not see myself doing this throughout my life. I was still young, and I was constantly looking for something.

By then I was very much interested in Tibetan studies. But at that time you could not go in deeper studies as a lay woman; and the Language an Cultural Studies in Bhutan was not accepting girls, it was open to monks only. One day I came across a monk from South India. I told him about my interests, and he suggested to go to Varanasi, where there is a University of the Indian Government for Tibetans. The Tibetan Women’s Association had requested the Dalai Lama to also accept girls, and at that time they were accepting girls for a try for two years. So I left my job without consulting anybody and went there; I took decisions like that, very impulsive decisions! I told my parents only after I had left my job, and they were totally devastated. Working in the Government was a big deal for them, but studying Tibetan was nothing.

**OST:** How did you support yourself in India?

**Tashi:** It is funny how I made decisions; I left for Varanasi without knowing where it was. I left my job at the Government and they gave me back my retirement money, about 1000 Dollars worth, about 20’000 Ngultrum. I went to see my parents and gave them 10’000 Nu, and I kept 10’000 for myself and went to India. But in India I got a little nervous; it was a long time study, and also quarter and food was free, I had to buy books, clothing, and travel costs to visit home. Then, I got to know a Canadian, a retired man from Canada who was studying Tibetan with my teacher, and I was doing translation for them, because I spoke a little English. He got interested in helping me, but he didn’t tell me, he told only my teacher, and back in Canada he used to send me 300 Dollars per year, for 3 years. Unfortunately he died later in an accident in India. But now, I’m still very connected to his family, to his daughter and son.

I was the first Bhutanese woman to study in Varanasi, and I studied there for 7 years, up to a Bachelor’s degree. Then, before even finishing my BA, I found another opportunity to go for another BA in the US, at one of the oldest women’s colleges, Mount Holyoke College, in South Hadley, Massachusetts. They had exchange programs with my University in Varanasi, and I helped the American students in their studies during their short winter term. So, I got to know their professors, and they encouraged me to apply for a scholarship. I got it and was able to study at their College! First, I finished my BA in Tibetan Studies and then left for America. It really opened my horizon! It was one of the best times in my life. It was so exciting I continued my education till I was 40! I did a BA in Developmental Studies, and designed my own major program taking courses in women’s studies, cultural anthropology and political science. First I did the master’s program, followed by a PhD thesis in 2009, at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst: Women’s contribution to gross national happiness: A critical analysis of the role of nuns and nunneries in education and sustainable development in Bhutan.
**OST:** How did you get in contact with GNH?

**Tashi:** In 2004 there was the first GNH conference in Bhutan, and I was in my final year of the PhD course. I went back home to attend the conference and presented a paper. I had seen the call for papers online; the paper is about education (Tashi Zangmo, *Literacy for All: One of the Means to Achieve Gross National Happiness.* In: Karma Ura & Karma Galay, eds, 2004: *Gross National Happiness and Development*, Proceedings of the First International Seminar on Operationalization of Gross National Happiness. The Centre for Bhutan Studies, Thimphu, Bhutan, pp. 629-636). My paper was well received, and that's how I came to know the Prime Minister Dasho Jigme Y. Thinley. In the following year I attended a similar conference in Canada, and that's how I entered the GNH discussion.

**OST:** You have also a son?

**Tashi:** After I finished my graduation from the Women’s College as a graduating Senior, I could apply for a fellowship called Public Service award. They pick two or three winners to go anywhere in the world to do public service. I was elected and got 10’000 Dollars for my project to build a small library for the nunnery in my village in Wamrong for two years; at the same time I was teaching adult literacy in the village; there I met my husband and we had a son, Songtsen Norbu. So, thank god, I had won that award, otherwise I would not have my son (laughs). My husband is a Bhutanese from the Lhuntsi district. He is working in the National Library. He also studied in Varanasi, but when I joined there, he had just finished and had left. I’m so grateful to my husband, he supports very much what I’m doing. He is always with my son and he is such a great father.

Because of this award I postponed my graduation, and when I went back to the US my son was one year old. I went back to continue my PhD, and so my son went to school there. During those years my husband was alone in Bhutan.

**OST:** You stayed in America for another eight years until you finished your PhD, and your son was nine years old when you returned to Bhutan. Was he very sad to leave the US?

**Tashi:** Yes, he had the hardest time, it really hurt me so much; back in Bhutan he couldn’t relate with anything. Before leaving I asked him whether he liked to change the school and he said: “Mom, as long as the school is in America I'd go to any school.” He is now in a private school in Thimphu. We chose that school because the pupils there speak English, coming from families with educated background. His Dzongkha is still poor, also by now he understands most of it. Because I didn’t speak to him in Dzongkha, he started learning it only when he was nine years old. His father is not very good in English, so, they are talking to each other in Dzongkha; each one is improving the others language.

You know, so many things happened in my life, when I look back it scares me!

**OST:** But you also where very lucky!

**Tashi:** Yes it is true. Whenever the opportunity knocked, without a second thought, I just took it. To begin with, when I went to Varanasi, it was the opportunity to get out of the country! Because there were already marriage proposals from my family, you know, for women staying alone in an apartment is not good. So I always said, I had a narrow escape! Finally, I was out of the country, I was again studying! But they didn't know that. They had no idea why and where I was going, what I was doing. When I went to India, the world was open for me! Even so studying was taking so much time and I was getting older, I didn’t care, I just wanted to do it! But at the same time I always wanted to be of use. During my studies in Varanasi I was already helping the village nunnery in any way I could, if not monetarily then by doing. I went there and taught, and all that. So I always tell our younger generation, especially my nephews and nieces that you have to think beyond yourself, that takes you far! There is the saying “when you think sky high, you reach to the rooftop”, and that’s really true! I tell them, smartness alone doesn’t work, you have to have a goal beyond yourself: that will take you far. I feel I had that genuine feeling inborn, and that took me far. Otherwise for me, there was all the reason to stop! Everywhere I went there were bumps! No money, no family support!

**OST:** But also in a positive sense: you had a job, why not stay!

**Tashi:** Yes, everything was open, I could write a book! That would help our younger generation today, yes, I have to – but I'm too lazy…

**OST:** Maybe now you are too busy, but one day it might get more quiet. Maybe when you’re 80!?
Tashi: (laughs) You know there is that saying one of my Tibetan teachers told me: “If you postpone a thing, it will never happen!” And he was giving a small anecdote as an example. “Once there was a student and his teacher, and the student always wanted to go home to see his mother. And the teacher wouldn’t let him go and kept saying, you go when you’ve finished your work. So, one day when they were having their lesson, the teacher saw from far away a man carrying a dead body on his shoulders. But the old teacher couldn’t see well, so he asked the student, what is going on out there? And the student said: I think he finished all his work, and he is going home now.”

OST: Thank you for the interview!

And don’t forget!

Under the heading “Meeting Point” the SSB Newsletter regularly features interviews with Bhutanese and Swiss people working, studying and visiting in the respective host country. It will give insight in the experiences and activities of Bhutanese and Swiss people in contact.

Contributions to this rubric from members of SSB and SBS, as well as the circle of readers of the Newsletter are most welcome!