

Nepal: Pete Andrews '70

We Meet Again

Four years ago, after watching a soccer game between India and Nepal during the Triangle Special Olympics, Pete Andrews '70 (MA) walked over to shake hands with the Nepali coach. It had been three decades since Andrews, now a UNC professor of environmental and public policy, had served in Nepal as a Peace Corps volunteer, and his memories were fond ones. He could not have remembered a 6-year-old boy from a village called Narayangarh, where he had served. Here was the boy, 30 years later, coaching a soccer match in North Carolina.

The coach had become the principal of the village school, and the encounter led Andrews to send a photograph of himself to his Nepali host family, who were still living in Narayangarh. A month later, a six-page letter arrived from his host "mother," who was proud to have been remembered by the tall American she had met when he was 21. She even included an e-mail address.

E-mail. It was unthinkable. When Andrews left Nepal in 1968, there was no electricity in most villages. He wanted to return to Nepal to see the changes for himself.

In January 2001, while doing research with the Kenan Institute in Bangkok, Andrews got that chance, taking a side trip with his wife and two grown children.

In 1966, Andrews, fresh out of Yale University, was part of the 11th Peace Corps team to live in Nepal since the country had opened to the outside world.

"Nepal's program was rooted in the priorities of the country," Andrews recalled, and that appealed to him. Among the 10 poorest counties in the world, Nepal needed help in increasing wheat yields, modernizing science textbooks and reforming educational curriculum. Andrews worked with local extension agents to teach farmers how to increase yields of dwarf winter wheat.

This from a young man whose mother couldn't get him to weed strawberries in the garden.

Andrews loved Nepal, despite having to bathe in a crowded public bathroom and eat rice with lentil sauce twice a day.

"I loved the Nepali people. It's who people are and not their material standard of living that matters. When I'd visit a Nepali home, they'd share their last chicken with me or they'd slaughter a goat. The level of generosity is amazing.



Pete Andrews '70, right, in Nepal in the 1960s.

"I was an ambassador of good will," said Andrews, who helped the local agricultural cooperative translate pesticide warnings into Nepali.

He sees a "clear trace" from Nepal to his professional interests. "The environmental and conservation issues are in your face every day," said Andrews, who came to UNC for a master's degree in regional planning and a doctorate in environmental and public policy after learning in Nepal about the University's graduate program in environmental planning.

Yet the family ties he found there may be just as important. Before his return visit, Andrews scoured photograph albums to find a snapshot of the woman who had been so hospitable to him. It was the only photograph she'd ever had taken.

The photographs he collected from his most recent visit show the smiling Andrews family, adorned with necklaces of marigolds from their hosts, standing alongside their adopted Nepali family. "You can have that sense of love, support and obligation across cultures, religion and economic conditions," he said.

As his flight rose above the valley leaving Nepal, Andrews looked down and saw the wheat fields he had worked to establish 30 years before. ■

— Susan Byrum Rountree '79

DAN SEARS '74



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