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**By Robert S. Mellis**

We were standing, Kinley Dorji and I, at 12,000 feet in Dochula Pass in the Himalaya Mountains. Kinley is the editor of Kuensel, the only newspaper in the kingdom of Bhutan, a country of 770,000 people squeezed between China and India. Back in 1994, he had asked while I was working in Singapore if I could come to the kingdom to assist in training his reporters and editors and to suggest ways he could increase the newspaper’s revenue stream so it might achieve financial independence from the Bhutanese government. This had required the approval of King Jigme Wanchuck IV, the young monarch in the country. Cutting through the red tape had been an exhausting struggle. The king had to weigh the benefits of my visit against the possibility that I might bring dangerous new and unstabilizing ideas into the kingdom. But Kinley persevered and King Jigme gave the go-ahead.

Dawn had not broken when Kinley stopped the car in Dochula Pass. But the earliest hint of the coming day could be seen on the snow-capped peaks. Mount Jomolhari, all 24,005 majestic feet of it, soared in the distance to our left. In moments, the golden light of the new day touched the peak and spread like liquid gold down the snow-covered mountain. I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the place. Kinley had been here many times before. He told me he visited this place in moments of indecision and turmoil in his life.

We stood in the pass, shivering while grasping mugs of rich, dark coffee from a flask he’d brought along, laced with sweetened condensed milk. A troupe of Himalayan langurs, three-to-four-foot tall apes, chattered as they crossed the road in front of us. They ignored us as they scampered downhill, looking for breakfast.

Kinley passed me a sandwich from his backpack and his question caught me off-guard. “Robert,” he asked, “do you know Kent, Connecticut?”   I told him I not only knew it, my eldest daughter lived and worked there. I asked him how he knew Kent.

“It’s a long story,” he said. And then, in the style I had learned to accept (starting at the very beginning), he told me. “Back when I was a boy of 15, our schools in Bhutan were quite elementary. But the current king’s father chose 15 Bhutanese children to be educated in India. After we graduated from high school in Darjeeling, we were then sent to universities around the world to further our education, I was sent to Sydney, Australia where I received a bachelor’s degree. But the king was not finished with me yet.

“His people found a place for my graduate studies at Columbia University in New York City.  ­­My roommate’s parents lived in Kent and he invited me to visit them on occasional weekends.”

Then Kinley used his favorite phrase, one I’d heard him utter each time I told him something that reinforced his belief that my visit had been preordained. “It is most auspicious,” he said as he smiled knowingly.

We drove back that morning to Thimpu, Bhutan’s capital with its single traffic light, stopping at a large prayer wheel at the side of the road. He and I joined a wrinkled old man who spent much of his day turning the 12-foot prayer wheel clockwise, thus gaining merit with the Buddha.

I spent the next 12 days uncovering a dozen ways for Kuensil, the newspaper, to become more financially sound as well as editorially more probing and independent.

I demonstrated to his staff the value of creating maps so readers could better visualize where a story occurred in Bhutan. No one in the editorial staff had ever seen a map. I taught the advertising manager how to leave his office and fax machine and actually get out and sell advertising to the local shop-keepers. But that question about Kent has lived on in my mind as I realize endlessly how we are all brothers around this globe.