

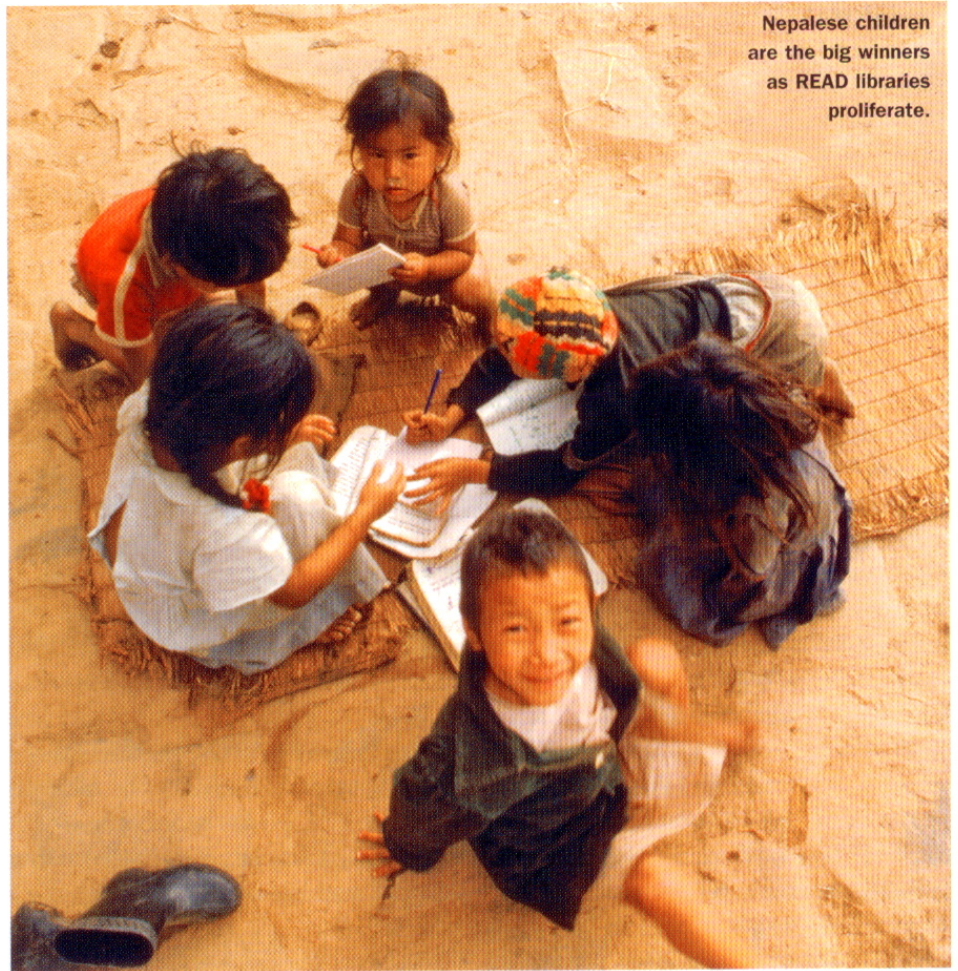
books alone” on the front (John and I had each been editor-in-chief)

- A matchbook from the Dojo Restaurant in Manhattan (I stole a dozen)
- The backstage passes for our “Bad Music Party” (the arm-in-arm group sing-along to “We Are the World” was the highlight of my Tufts career)

At the bottom of the box lay seven envelopes, one sealed by each Dojo member. Each contained six questionnaires with predictions for the others, plus another sheet of general predictions for us, Tufts, and the world. We cracked open new beers and took turns reading our answers.

“Does John still like Amy?” The two O’Keefes, she a Zimmet until their marriage three years ago, tried to look nonchalant as the noes edged the yeses four to three. (Luckily, John was a yes.) Scott predicted Brian Ostrer would be fat: “Not super fat, but he’s about two and a half bills.” Brian is more than a few Arby’s beef-and-cheddars shy of 250. Guesses on Josh’s location ranged from Seattle to the mid-Atlantic, as a teacher, lawyer, or political aide; I later sent a copy of the surveys to his Foreign Service posting in Uzbekistan. Guesses on the president ranged from Bill Weld to Bill Bradley, but only Josh knew that Professor Robert Devigne, with his wild hair, black-on-black outfits, and sermons on *Pulp Fiction* through the lens of Hobbes and Rousseau, would be head of the poli-sci department.

As we howled at our decade-old jokes and memories, a strange thing began to happen. Suddenly, there was John, venturing onto the wobbly pigeon-covered deck at 39 Curtis Avenue. Josh was presiding over a mold-growing contest in our broken mini-fridge. Jason Greif was going on about the mouse who ate our Taco Bell hot sauce. On Alex Berk’s 1980s projection TV, the Red Sox were fielding a rookie by the side-splitting name of Nomar Garcia-parra. Scott was packing for law school, I was pondering an offer to be a police reporter in Roswell, New Mexico, and our biggest worry was whether drinking white Russians would make us look uncool. The reunion reminded us of 1997, but the time capsule actually sent us there.



Nepalese children are the big winners as READ libraries proliferate.

## Lofty Reading

*How libraries are jump-starting local economies in Nepal*

BY JACQUELINE MITCHELL

**O**N HER FIRST TRIP TO Nepal, in 1983, Antonia Neubauer, J65, sat on a god. “I thought it was a rock,” she explains. That misunderstanding prompted her to start a new kind of travel company, one that would immerse people in the culture of the places they visit. She also hoped to improve the lives of those who hosted her globe-trotting clientele, and eventually she hit upon a model for development that she thinks could catch on worldwide.

Her concept has already worked wonders in Nepal, which the United

Nations has identified as one of the least-developed countries on earth. Per-capita income is below \$300 a year. Until 1951, only royalty went to school, and even now the literacy rate is just 50 percent. Yet by the end of 2007, this remote, ancient kingdom will possess 45 comprehensive libraries, many with Internet access—thanks to READ (Rural Education and Development), the nonprofit organization Neubauer launched in 1991.

The key to READ’s success, according to Neubauer, is a bottom-up approach. Each village must write a

formal proposal and commit to raising 15 to 20 percent of the \$50,000 it costs to build a library (READ pays the rest through its fund-raising efforts). The proposal must specify a small business venture—a rickshaw service, for instance, or ambulances, hotels, or orchards—whose proceeds will support the library. Once built, the libraries require no further outside help.

Neubauer, who graduated from Tufts with a double major in French and economics, is a teacher at heart. She studied French literature at New York University, then earned a doctorate in education administration from Loyola University Chicago. After 15 years teaching French and Spanish to middle schoolers, she authored Philadelphia's first citywide study on literacy and collaborated with the Philadelphia High School Academies—a joint venture between schools and businesses—to strengthen the city's worst-performing high schools.

With her travel company, Myths and Mountains, Neubauer now designs itineraries for those who want to “get inside the people's lives” in Asia, Antarctica, Africa, and South America. “I am still a teacher,” she says. “Taking people on a trip is like running a class. It's creating an experience

from which people can learn.”

As for that other goal—the goal of helping people in the countries where Myths and Mountains goes—it took Neubauer a few years to find the right approach. In Nepal, she started a nonprofit that supplied desks and benches to rural schools. She raised money for hospitals and scraped together scholarship funds to send the occasional student to school in the United States. But these acts of charity were, she says, “Band-Aids on bleeding arteries.” So

(particularly as he had just been run out of Nepal by a romantic rival). Then, in 1991, on a 13-hour flight to Nepal, Neubauer found herself seated in the same row as the schoolmaster from Domi's village. Out of this chance encounter, READ was conceived. Nine months later, eight porters carried 900 books down a mountain path into Domi's village to start a new locally sustained library.

Today, each READ library in Nepal houses sections on women's health, pre-

## More than a million Nepalese have access to the libraries and the 300,000 books they contain.

she finally asked a trusted Nepalese guide, Domi, what he would do to improve his village. The answer: build a library.

“He actually just meant a place where he could read lots of newspapers, but a light bulb went off over my head,” says Neubauer. She knew of one library in Nepal that supported itself with the proceeds from a lemon orchard. The expat who built it was happy to hand the project over to her

school education, entrepreneurship, and computer and multimedia training. More than a million Nepalese have access to the libraries and the 300,000 books they contain. Neubauer credits such resources with raising the numbers of rural children who pass the School Leaving Certificate Examination.

On average, the libraries and their supporting businesses create five jobs per village, no small benefit in a nation where unemployment hovers at 42 percent. Profits from the businesses also underwrite services such as literacy classes, preschools, clinics, and stipends for the poor. “We don't go to the villages. They come to us,” says Neubauer. In fact, she says, neighboring hamlets often try to top each other's libraries.

With a new two-person office and two library projects under way in India, READ is going global. Neubauer has plans to bring it to five nations within five years. “A lot of people in a lot of places will do this,” she says. “Everyone wants their children to be better off than they are.” In Nepal, the venture even received an odd sort of endorsement from Maoist rebels. They burned government buildings but left the libraries—and the offices of READ—untouched. To Neubauer, it was a sign that while some buildings “belonged to the authorities, the libraries belonged to the people.”

### FINDINGS

## 'SHROOM SERVICE



**Worried about getting sick this winter? Try popping some mushrooms—just regular old white button mushrooms, the kind on a pizza. They may “promote innate immunity against tumors and viruses,” according to scientists at Tufts' Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging and China's National Institute of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention. The fungus appears to heighten the activity of so-called natural killer cells, a vital part of the immune system. The research, in which mice were fed a diet containing different concentrations of white mushroom powder, appeared in the June issue of the *Journal of Human Nutrition*.**