

A BURNING DESIRE TO HELP

German plastic surgeon dedicates his life to treatment and training in reconstructive surgery in Nepal

Why the children?



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HEROES IN THE HOSPITAL
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KUNDA DIXIT

Andreas Settle had a comfortable, well-paying job as a surgeon and a settled family life in Germany when, one day 15 years ago, he saw an ad in the paper from a German charity to help set up a burns hospital in Nepal. It was fated that he should get the job. He sold his house and moved

with his wife and two daughters to Nepal in 1998.

He came for two years, but ended up spending nearly nine, helping establish the Sushma Koirala Memorial Burns Hospital in Sankhu, and training Nepali doctors and nurses in plastic surgery. There was a conflict going on and they had to treat war-wounded from both sides. When the Sankhu Police Station was attacked by

the Maoists, the hospital served as an emergency ward for the sudden rush of wounded.

In 2002, a bus travelling on the East-West Highway was firebombed by the Maoists during Tihar 11 years ago this week. Passengers Anil Regmi and her two children were severely hurt and Anil died two agonising weeks later at a hospital in Kathmandu. Her husband Bhakta Bahadur, who works as

a forest ranger in Patlaiya, was left to take care of the children Rabin and Rabin.

After *Nepal Times* reporter Naresh Newar wrote about them, there was an outpouring of support for the children. The Bright Horizons boarding school offered scholarships and after he read the story, Settle offered to perform extensive reconstructive surgery on

Rabin and Rabin. This week, the sister and brother celebrated Bhai Tika in Patlaiya and it is hard to tell that the two were once so horrifically disfigured. They are doing well in Grades 8 and 9, are self-confident, and are popular with their classmates. The story of the two children was featured in Keshav Tseten's award-winning film, *Frames of War* in 2009.



A NEW LIFE: The original story of Rabin and Rabin in *Nepal Times* of 2 December 2002 and the children after the first of many skin graft operations at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Burns Hospital (left). On Tuesday, Rabin and Rabin pose after celebrating Bhai Tika at their home in Patlaiya (above). Andreas Settle (below, right) and his team performing reconstructive surgery on an ex-Maoist combatant at a field hospital in Kailali (below, left).



"The kind of personal satisfaction and sense of achievement I have in Nepal is hard to describe in words," says Settle, now 53, who was on one of his annual trips back to Nepal last month. But more than the individual cases, he is happy to have helped establish a core group of surgeons and nurses trained in plastic surgery who now work in hospitals all

over Nepal. While performing surgeries in field hospitals, Settle gets translation help from his two daughters who grew up in Sankhu and speak fluent Nepali, as well as his wife Kerstin, who is a nurse.

One of Settle's colleagues, Raju Pandey, has set up Nepal Plastic Surgery Hospital in Harisiddhi and Nirajan Bista has set up his

own reconstructive health department for reconstructive surgery at Nepal Medical College in Jorpati after specialised training in Germany. Binod Karn now runs a unit for plastic and burn surgery at the Nepalgunj Medical College in Kailashpur. Sundesh Maskey runs a similar department at the Kathmandu Medical College. "The skills are important,

but what is more vital is a commitment to the job of healing," Settle explains. "It is a thankless job because most patients expect to get back to their former selves and that is impossible when wounds are severe."

After finishing at Sushma Koirala, Settle has been involved in ManMayaMed, a charity named after one of his first patients who was so badly burnt that her chin was joined to her chest. The group supports training for Nepali doctors and nurses and has set up a self-help Burn Ladies Group in Sankhu where former burn patients take care of others like them who, besides physical injuries, need psycho-social counselling.

A donor community of 5,000

people in Germany raises money for ManMayaMed's work in Nepal and Settle returns as often as he can for on-the-job training in latest surgery techniques and field camps in western Nepal where he thinks the need is greatest for burns and accident victims.

Thirty per cent of burns among women in Nepal is from suicide attempts, five per cent are caused by domestic violence, and the rest are accidents. The incidence of acid attacks on women is also on the rise in the Terai. There are more female burn patients in Nepal because many are stigmatised for being disfigured. The most important part of burn care is immediate treatment, which raises the chances of survival and successful surgery. Settle says his job in Nepal is not finished. "We really need to emphasise fresh burn treatment and to raise the survival rate for those with more than 30 per cent burns."

www.manmayamed.org

nepalstimes.com

A burning problem, #581
Rabin and Rabin in hospital, #124
Segment of Frames of War

