

A Journey of Faith

Simon Watkinson speaks to Dr Mark Macdonald, reconstructive surgeon and medical superintendent at Anandaban hospital, and his English wife Jo about their life and work in Nepal. They met in 1993 through the International Nepal Fellowship (INF) where Jo was working as a midwife.

Strangely enough, I had heard of Dr Mark Macdonald before I came to TLM as a friend in Salisbury had known Mark when he had lived in Dunedin, New Zealand. So it was good to put a face to a name when I visited Nepal in September 2000.

'Nepal has been good to me!' Mark announced happily to the staff at the celebration picnic held for his baby son, Cameron Hugh, in the idyllic grounds of Anandaban hospital. 'I came here seven years ago on my own and now I have a wonderful wife and family.'

I caught up with Mark and Jo shortly afterwards to speak to them about life at Anandaban.

'I felt a strong call from God, firstly to become a doctor, then a surgeon,' Mark began. 'Though I never finished my training in orthopaedics – sometimes you have to let certain dreams go – I had made a covenant commitment with God to Third World mission at University. Before coming to Nepal, I had a medical elective in Kenya where God equipped me with some of the many skills that I would need here.'

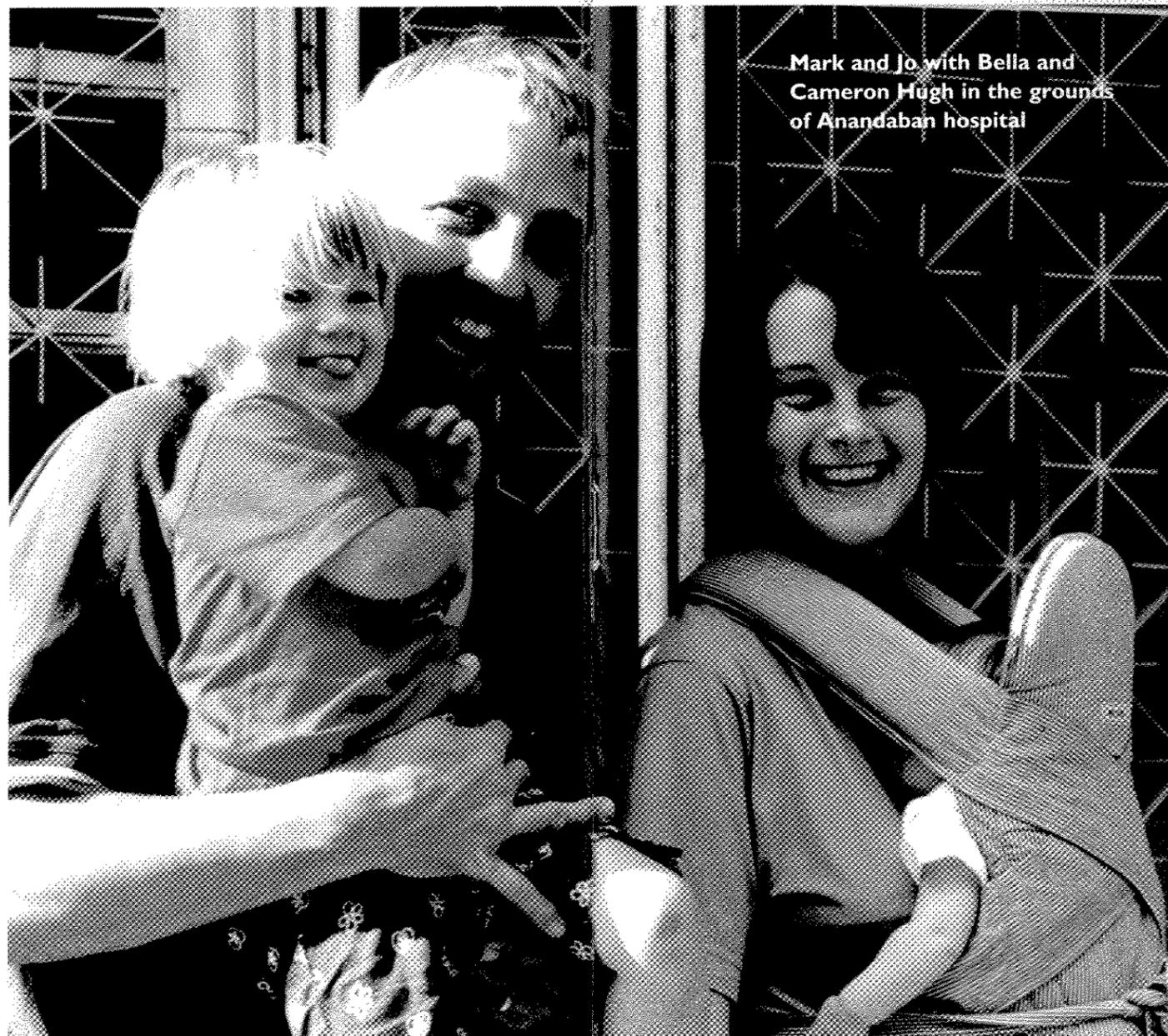
His weekly afternoon visits, to the INF's hospital in Pokhara to do surgery, had started him thinking about leprosy surgery as at that time he didn't even know that TLM existed.

'Then TLM heard about us and the New Zealand director approached us about coming to Anandaban hospital,' he explained. 'We had some friends working at Anandaban so, after we got married in 1997, we came here.'

Surveying the breathtaking environment, Jo said, 'It's a very beautiful place to live, and definitely not the worst place in the world that God could have sent us.'

'It's a privilege to leave the house in the morning and walk through the forest to work. Even though we're not far from a big city, you still feel part of

a small community which is more like a family,' Mark added. 'Recently, a few more foreigners have come to work here and language barriers mean it may sometimes take longer to establish relationships. As I enjoy people contact, communication barriers are frustrating and it's an ongoing challenge to find ways around this.'



Mark and Jo with Bella and Cameron Hugh in the grounds of Anandaban hospital

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

Philippians 2: 3-4

'The other challenge, which is quite humbling, is to decide which western hospital procedures should be incorporated here to raise the standards and quality of care and which procedures are inappropriate, given the limited resources or the cultural context within which you're working. To know what to change and what to accept takes a lot of wisdom from God and quite often entails biting your tongue,' he continued.

'You have to allow for differences of opinion and this can be difficult for us Westerners who tend to think that we have the proven procedures. In the end it's just a different way of doing things which, in the

professional context of medicine, is equally as valid,' Mark conceded.

As medical superintendent and reconstructive surgeon, there is an increasing demand on Mark's time, yet he has co-ordinated a few sporting activities around the hospital. As well as rock climbing with staff members, his passion over the past few years has been the Anandaban Cricket Club. Sometimes he will also join the staff for lunch-time table tennis matches.

I asked Mark about the highlights of his time at Anandaban.

'I will never forget the joyful faces of one or two patients who've been overwhelmed by the results of surgery. To wander on to a ward and see a twelve year old boy using a previously clawed hand, which I'd operated on, to pick up his food and to realise that I've had the privilege of contributing to a life, has been really special. The leprosy camps have also enabled me to learn what it's like to have leprosy in a rural community with restricted access to healthcare.'

They then went on to tell me where they saw themselves in the future.

'We're both committed to mission long-term,' Jo said, 'and would be very happy to still be working in Nepal.'

'How long we stay here depends on a lot of things, for example, visas,' Mark suggested. 'If we can still contribute to the work here then we will consider staying. But if future work means some retraining or some time in another environment then this may be best. Ultimately you can make all the plans as human beings and God may have a completely different agenda. We came here knowing that it would take five years to learn the language, culture and people's needs and make a worthy contribution. The longer we're here, the more we can help.'

'We're both committed to leprosy and to Nepal,' he emphasised. 'It depends on what God has in store and where the needs are, which is a little uncertain, but we're both prepared to exist under uncertainty because then you exist in faith.'

As I'd anticipated before meeting them, Mark and Jo's inspirational journey of faith was also their way of life. ■