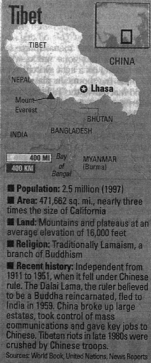


The Peninsula

Boxed Office Hours: 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
 Sun. 11:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.



Population: 2.5 million (1997)
Area: 471,822 sq. mi., nearly three times the size of California
Climate: Mountains and plateaus at an average elevation of 10,000 feet
Religion: Traditionally Lamaism, a branch of Buddhism
Recent history: Independent from 1911 to 1951, when it fell under Chinese rule. The Dalai Lama, the ruler believed to be a Buddha reincarnated, fled to India in 1959. China broke up large estates, took control of mass communications and gave key jobs to Chinese. Tibetan riots in late 1980s were crushed by Chinese troops.
 Source: World Book, United Nations News Reports

MERCURY NEWS

Dr. Nancy Harris, holding an X-ray at the Redwood City emergency room where she works half the year, discusses treatment for Ariel Crispin, 12, who had twisted her knee and was at the hospital with her mother, Teresa Crispin. Harris spends the rest of the year helping children suffering from malnutrition throughout Tibet. She founded the Tibet Child Nutrition and Collaborative Health Project in 1993.

EDGENE LOUIE—MERCURY NEWS

BY KAREN DE SA
 Mercury News

FOR HALF of every year, Redwood City doctor Nancy Harris braves the world's highest altitudes to gently probe misshapen ribs and bloated bellies. She checks limp limbs and malformed heads, peering into the ruddy-checked faces of thousands of Tibetan children she hopes to help survive into adulthood.

The children face immediate threat perhaps greater than any political or environmental: a simple lack of nourishment. For Harris, a single day's interest in the medical mission is an urgent one.

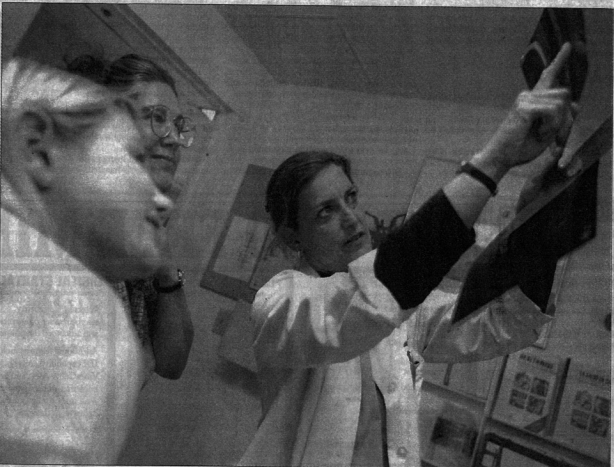
Her research shows that more than half of Tibetan children under age 7 are severely malnourished.

Harris credits the Tibet Child Nutrition and Collaborative Health Project, which has battled malnutrition since 1993. Few international agencies have addressed the little-known problem because of bureaucratic obstacles and the sensitive nature of Tibet—a closely guarded, autonomous region of China.

While human rights observers blame the hunger on decades of Chinese repression,

A CROSS BORDERS

Redwood City doctor helps Tibetan children survive



In Tibet, Nancy Harris works at an altitude of 16,000 feet.

most obsessively, her friends and colleagues say, on the million children at risk.

"I had to learn other skills," she said, "not just being a doctor, but a diplomat, personnel manager, fundraiser and administrator. I was uniquely unprepared to do anything like this 15 years out at the outset. This was impos-

ible."

In an unusual arrangement with Kaiser Permanente, Harris, 43, works half of each year in the HMO's Redwood City emergency room and half in Tibet. At home in Moss Beach, she lives amid a flurry of fundraising activities, coaxing donations from macro-pharm firms, film stars and philanthropists.

At a recent fundraiser in a lavish Napa Valley winery, donors bid five figures on Tibet memorabilia as they floated on margaritas, potent mistroquinos and imported card cream puffs. More than \$400,000 was raised, saving about 40,000 lives, Harris esti-

mates. "Everything has been taken from them, the pearly away from all the trappings, and yet somehow, their highest human spirit seems to be rising instead of being crushed," Harris said. "They are the most joyful people to be around. They've found a way to survive their tremendous adversity."

EDGENE LOUIE—MERCURY NEWS



The hands of Nancy Harris spend half the year in Redwood City and the other half in Tibet. She founded the Tibet Child Nutrition and Collaborative Health Project.

Doctor reaches out for Tibetans

Nancy Harris spend half the year treating malnourished children

TIBET

from Page 1B

At a posable reception, in a tailored green skirt suit that seemed to hang awkwardly on a woman more suited to scrubs or blue jeans, Harris shyly appealed for money and a restoration of Tibet—"the bedrock for humanity."

"I am a doctor, a simple doctor," she told the crowd of fashion designers, winemakers and Buddha-inspired mountaineers. "One of the determinants of the outcome of a culture is if the children survive."

For the first five years of her project, Harris collected measurements, blood and stool samples in dirt-floor clinics warmed by yak dung fuel. Now she returns each year with a team of Chinese and Tibetan professionals to provide medical care in remote villages; her next trip begins this month. In the field, she survives on beef jerky and chocolate bars, working at altitudes of 16,000 feet, places where tourists need oxygen masks to breathe.

Harris has uncovered grim statistics: 62 percent of the children studied were severely stunted because of malnutrition, 41 percent were chronically malnourished and 67 percent suffered from rickets, a debilitating condition caused by a lack of vitamin D.

Compiling data

Easily preventable conditions are wreaking the most havoc. Diarrhea and pneumonia cause innumerable deaths, her data shows. Her study is in the final stages of review for publication in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The data is needed, she says, to dispel long-held myths about Tibetans: that they are

short because of high altitudes, not malnutrition; that their bluish hair and seared red cheeks are natural, rather than the result of severe protein deficiency and wicked sun and wind; and unswayed of their many layers of clothing, the children's bodies are malnourished and stunted, their legs bowed and wobbly. Many children appear to be babies, are actually undersized children.

"I had to learn other skills, not just being a doctor, but a diplomat, personnel manager, fundraiser and administrator. I was uniquely unqualified to do anything like this. I was told at the outset this was impossible."

—Dr. Nancy Harris, who spends half the year caring for malnourished Tibetan children

"Childhood malnutrition (in Tibet) is very much undertreated as a problem by aid agencies," by the public, by China, all for different reasons," said a senior advisory, president of the Washington, D.C.-based International Campaign for Tibet, at a recent global forum. "It's something that's been largely being ignored. She is a place where human rights activists say one wrong move — a slipped-up phrase or conversation with a dissident —

could lead to the end of an international relief project.

"The point about Nancy's project is that she's not political; she just goes there to help the Tibetan children, using their own ways and cultures," Thurman said. "She's saving a lot of ruined lives."

To aid in their survival, Harris has examined more than 2,000 children in 100 villages, delivering basic medicines and antibiotics that in fearful remoteness years later she discovers have saved lives. The children are dying of unscientific causes, she says: a lack of soap and water, clean drinking water and antibiotics.

The health project has distributed \$800,000 worth of donated medical supplies and has trained 300 Tibetan nurses to deliver primary health care services in remote regions far outside their view. Hundreds of children are being treated for childhood ailments with a combination of traditional Tibetan remedies imported from the West.

"The families have the awareness that something is terribly wrong with their children," Harris said.

Around the globe, excited Tibetans and human rights groups blame China's brutal rule of Tibet for the devastation that has occurred there, including millions of villagers who live without education or health care.

Annexation International's most recent annual report cites "gross human rights violations, particularly against Tibetan Buddhists and nationalists" within the autonomous region.

Elected activists, under the leadership of the Nobel Prize-winning Dalai Lama, say Tibetans are getting hungry because of China's long-standing policy of resettling poor Chinese farmers to the region, increasing competition for scarce food and resources.

But some scholars believe malnutrition in

Contact: Karen de Sa at ksa@mercury.com or (650) 963-9398.