

Story 16 Ramesh

My Life Before the Earthquake

My name is Ramesh Khatri. I was born in Dhailake, Nepal, which was a rural area and still is. Due to the rural nature of the area, survival was difficult. There was a lack of facilities, such as proper education, transportation, and job opportunities in Dhailake. As a result, people were forced to go to India for a better life, achievement, and earning money. Going to India became a tradition: my grandfather and father also went to India to earn money. Our family also went to India for a better life. Our life ran smoothly, and we were able to study in India—my brother, sister, and I. But slowly, due to my father’s aging, his health weakened, and there was a lack of income. We had to face problems staying in India because only my father was the source of income, and we were three children who needed to be supported for education, food, clothing, and shelter—all of which required money. So, we returned to our home in Dhailake. Even after returning home, survival was still difficult. I got admitted to the local school, but there was no proper education in our rural areas. Due to the rural nature of the area, there were limited facilities. Early in the morning, I would wake up and go to the field to cut grass. After finishing the housework, I would go to school with my friends. At around 4 o’clock, I would return home and again go to the forest to cut grass and gather wood. Sometimes, if there was free time, my friends and I would swim in the river and go fishing for enjoyment. In the evening, we would return home and cook the fish for dinner. Those times were happy for us, and we also shared our dinner with our neighbors. Sharing is caring. We shared both our sadness and happiness with each other. The culture, traditions, festivals, and the nature of our village brought joy and happiness into our lives, and my childhood passed like this. Slowly, time passed, and my childhood turned into memories.

Growing Responsibilities and Work in Kathmandu

As time passed, my father grew older and weaker, and my responsibilities grew larger. But I was a hard worker and responsible from a young age. I understood the condition of my family and their problems, and as the eldest son, I knew I had to help. To solve our financial problems

and to give proper education to my brothers and sisters, I went to Kathmandu city to work while I was in grade 8. I started washing dishes in Kathmandu, in Balaju. Slowly, I learned to cook food. I continued this work for two years. After two years, I returned home and found that my school friends had advanced in their studies, with some even going to India for work.

After some time, I also went to India and worked as a laborer in construction for four months. Then, I returned to Kathmandu to work again. After a long time, in 2015 AD, I was ready to return home. Everything seemed fine, but I didn’t know that day would be the darkest day of my life—a day that would completely change my life.

The Earthquake That Changed My Life

On April 25, 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck Nepal, killing over 8,000 people and injuring over 25,964. I was one of the victims of that earthquake. At the time, I was working at a guesthouse in Kathmandu. I was having lunch on the 8th floor when the earthquake hit. I tried to escape, but when I reached the 4th floor, the building collapsed. I felt groggy and called for help, but I wasn’t sure if anyone could hear me. It took a long time for help to arrive. In such a dark situation, I refused to give up. I made myself believe in my self-esteem and self-confidence to get out and seek help. I didn’t want to die there, even though 30 people had already died in the same building. After 12 hours, I could feel someone digging above me and was rescued.

I lost consciousness on my way to the hospital. I was transferred to a teaching hospital where I woke up three days later, shocked to realize that I had lost both of my legs. I had no words to describe what I felt at that moment. Two months later, I was discharged from the hospital. At that time, I felt like “a fish living without water.” It was hard for me to live, but I didn’t want to die in such a way. I wanted to keep struggling and live my life to the fullest again. Even though I lost my legs, I never lost my self-esteem and self-confidence.

Support from Family, Friends, and Organizations

My family, friends, relatives, doctors, and nurses all encouraged and supported me. They gave me love and care, which helped me to move forward. Many national and international organizations also helped with food, clothing, shelter, and arti-

ficial legs. With the help of Davina Bulot, Pawan Tuladhar, and Pawan Paradgan, I began taking classes at Navajivan Madhyamik Vidyalaya. I couldn’t believe that within a year of the earthquake, I had the opportunity to study again.

Pursuing My Passion for Sports

While studying, I also got involved in sports. After winning the “Differently Able Idols” prize for showcasing my dancing talent, I received much media attention. This encouraged me to pursue my real passion: swimming. I began training at NSCIA and won a competition, receiving a medal from the President of Nepal in December 2016. I qualified as a national player through the National Para Swimming Association and went to Japan for training. Then, I participated in the Asian Para Games in Jakarta in 2018 after raising funds from well-wishers. I competed in the 50m freestyle swimming category, finishing in 46.49 seconds. This performance earned me a training opportunity in Korea and the Dream Program 2020. However, I couldn’t represent Nepal at the 2019 London World Championships due to financial constraints, despite being qualified.

Challenges and Future Goals

I initially stayed in a hostel, but I wanted to continue my studies and sports, so I moved out and started living in a room. This way, I could do my best and keep moving forward. However, the COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide and caused a lockdown, which made things more difficult for me. Slowly, things improved, and I completed my Intermediate level education. I am now pursuing my bachelor’s degree, though the journey has been challenging. One of my biggest goals is to play in the Paralympic Games, but the Nepalese government doesn’t support para-athletes financially, and I can’t afford it on my own. In May 2024, the World Championship Series will be held in Singapore from the 17th to the 19th. I hope to be able to participate, despite the financial difficulties.

