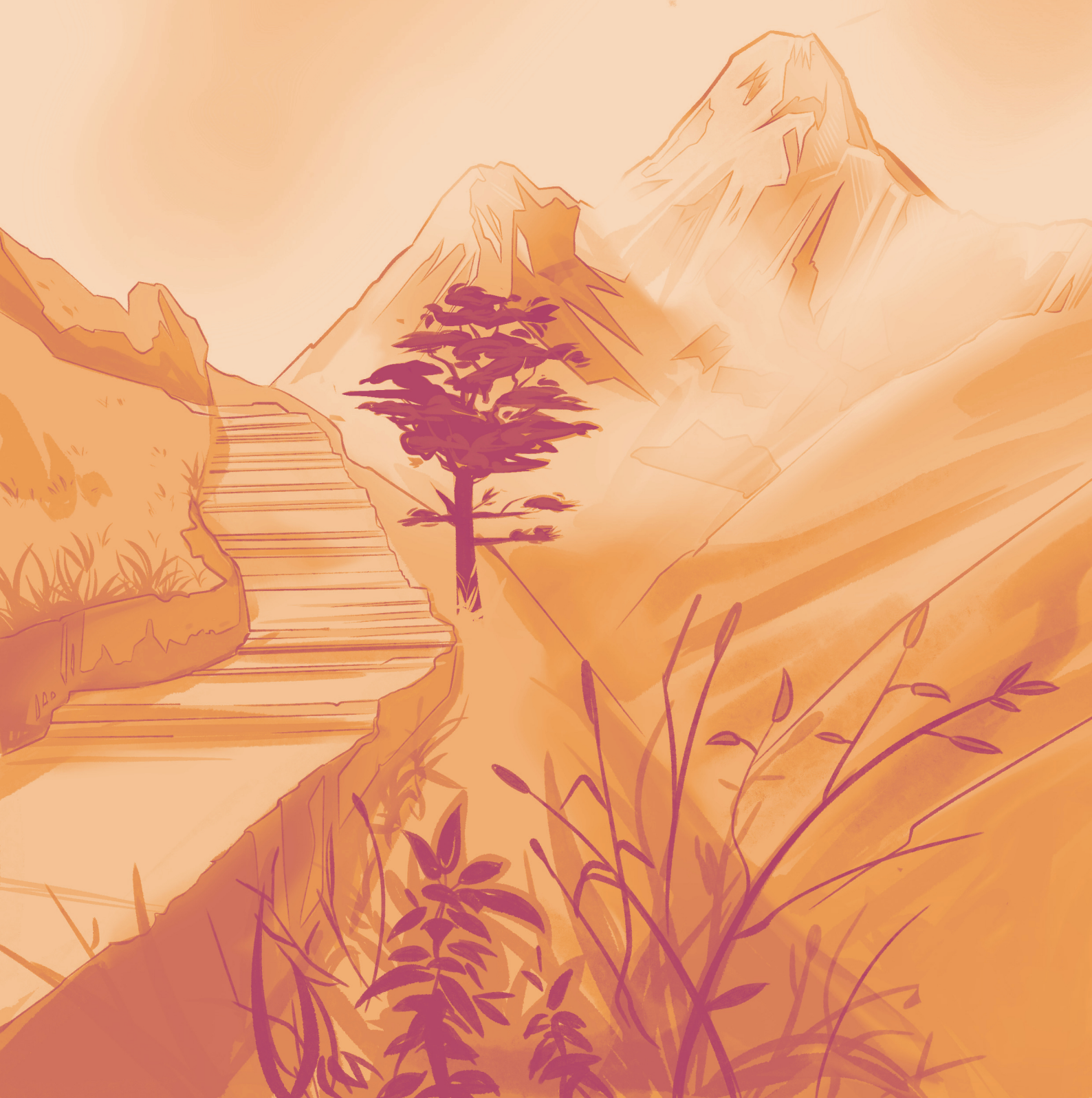


ENGAGE



Story 3 Kesh.B. Gurung

Early Life and Education

I was born in a remote village called Laprak in Gorkha district, and I spent my childhood there with my family. However, I completed my secondary education at Manaslu Boarding School in Sorhakhutte, Kathmandu. I had interests in poetry writing, singing, dancing, art, and sports. My academic performance was also good. I usually ranked first, second, or third in class.

The Decision to Study Veterinary Science

Although I wanted to pursue fine arts for higher education, following my family's advice for a better future, I enrolled in veterinary studies at a college in Lalitpur for my bachelor's degree. Despite not having much interest in veterinary science, I studied hard for two years and passed. Then I went to Rautahat district for about 5-6 months for OJT (On-the-Job Training). However, even during my bachelor's studies, I used to go trekking with brothers and friends from the village.

Transition to Trekking

So, after completing the OJT training, I returned to Kathmandu and decided to earn some money by going trekking again with friends and brothers from the village. Soon after returning from Rautahat, I headed towards the Annapurna Circuit trek. The trekking went better than expected. This wasn't my first time though. During school holidays, I used to tag along with brothers and friends occasionally. It provided opportunities to make many friends, and the income was good too. I used to earn enough pocket money by going on treks.

Changing Focus to Trekking

Now, I started thinking that instead of struggling to earn in veterinary, I'd rather make money while enjoying trekking. So I began dedicating all my time to trekking. What started as a few days of fun became my main source of income. But where there's earning, there's spending too. No matter how much I earned, I used to spend it all having fun with friends. Although I couldn't save money, I had made many Nepali and foreign friends. After 5 years

of trekking, I also obtained a guide license from the Nepal government.

the Earthquake and Its Impact

When the great earthquake struck on April 25, 2015, I was in a friend's room. Suddenly, due to the earthquake tremors, everyone inside the house started rushing out in fear, and we also immediately headed towards open spaces. Looking around from the open area, we saw all the houses had collapsed, and many people were injured. We helped as much as we could. About 2-4 days after the earthquake, we, about 30-40 village brothers, discussed and took some relief supplies from Kathmandu to our birthplace. It took about 2 days of walking from Kathmandu to reach our birthplace. That 2-day journey wasn't easy at all.

Arriving Back Home

Even then, aftershocks were still occurring. Upon reaching our birthplace, villagers were crying and everyone was asking about their sons and daughters. The earthquake had left everyone in mourning. Moreover, since it was the trekking season, many mothers in our village had lost their children. But fortunately, I wasn't on a trek. When I reached the village, my parents were safe. Seeing their son return home after many years, they shed tears of joy. But hearing about my sister's condition made me a bit sad. I found out only after reaching the village that my pregnant sister had been taken to Pokhara hospital for treatment after being crushed by a falling tree in the April 25 earthquake.

The Devastation of Laprak

After the earthquake had completely flattened the entire village, there was no question of staying there. With about 650 households, it was difficult for everyone to live in one place. So people were scattered in different locations. Due to the loss of many lives and property, all villagers were in deep sorrow. A few days after we arrived in the village, we started working with NGOs/INGOs. In this context, when OXFAM International proposed to help another village, Gumda, we went with relief materials in a tractor with some friends.

The Tractor Accident

After finishing the relief distribution program, we stayed one night in that village. There were

still some relief materials left. While returning with those remaining supplies in the tractor, about 5-6 of us friends, the trolley broke and I fell from the cliff. Among the 6 friends, I fell several meters down the slope. At that time, due to injuries in many parts of my body, I couldn't even tell where the main injury was. Because of a severe injury to my left eye, I cried a lot thinking I had gone blind. Blood was flowing profusely from my eye, nose, and a large hole in my chin compared to other places. But after a while, when I tried to touch below my waist and couldn't feel anything, I tried to move but couldn't. After that, I started crying even more and when I called for help around, finally a village brother who was returning with us in the tractor was saying from the road above, "Don't worry, brother."



The Rescue and Aftermath

The pain at that time, especially in the back and below the waist, was a different kind of pain I had never experienced before. It took about 2-3 hours to rescue me from the cliff and bring me up. My friends, brothers, and sisters who were involved in my rescue were very worried while waiting for the Nepal Army helicopter. And I was even more alone down the cliff, enduring the pain, calling out to my friends above. But

after 1 hour of waiting, when the Nepal Army couldn't locate us due to bad weather, our OXFAM International friend and other rescue friends advised to contact Shree Air Alliance for a private helicopter, which some friends told me was coming. When friends were carrying me, my back was hurting a lot. While rescuing me, they cleared the maize field without much concern and made a helipad, from where I was admitted to Annapurna Neuro Hospital in Kathmandu in about 30-40 minutes.

Surgery and Recovery

But the surgery, which lasted 8-10 hours, was performed only 3 days after admission. From the moment of the fall until the surgery, I hadn't lost consciousness. But when I heard the doctor's post-operation results, I was completely shocked. I had regained life, but the condition in which I received it felt like a punishment rather than a blessing. I had become a living corpse. The consolations from family and friends felt hollow to me. My mind was clouded by dark thoughts. The urge to end my life came every moment. Yesterday, I was walking around consoling earthquake victims, and today, how could I console myself that the rest of my life would be spent in a wheelchair? How could I calm the mind of that old mother who had blessed her son on his birthday, now seeing him on a hospital bed?

Dreams and Disappointment

I hadn't told many people about my plans to go to Italy, only a few close friends. I wanted to surprise others. But in the end, the surprise was on me. Life was just starting to look up, and suddenly this accident brought it crashing down. My dream of going to Italy remained just a dream. I still wanted to do so much while staying in my own country. I wanted to take some mountain climbing training and climb the world's highest peaks like Everest, earn more, and make my life more meaningful. In the end, dreams remain just dreams.

Reflecting on the Past

While in the hospital, I kept remembering moments from the past. Going on treks during the trekking season, and in other seasons going to Manang to pick and buy Yarchagumba (cordyceps) and other herbs, earning money, gambling and spending it all there. Then going back to the highlands to earn again, spending it all there again, and returning to Kathmandu empty-handed. I especially remembered the times when everyone called me “Sardar” (leader) with respect and fed me delicious food during treks. As someone who used to roam the mountains, hills, and plains constantly, now lying restless on a hospital bed, my mind and spirit almost stopped working.

Rehabilitation and New Beginnings

After about a month and a half stay at Annapurna Neuro Hospital, I was referred to a rehabilitation center. When I arrived there, seeing the environment felt like I had come to a different world. During my hospital stay, I felt like I was the only wheelchair user, but arriving there and seeing people with disabilities of various age groups everywhere, I was stunned. Therapy, personal hygiene, wheelchair use, and exercise were trained daily. As I started mingling, I began to make friends. I started to see a different world there. I finally realized that I had truly gotten a new life. But even then, frustration, anxiety, depression, and physical issues like urinary tract infections hadn’t left me.

Support and Strength

At that time, friends from various departments of the rehabilitation center were constantly trying to help me in every way possible. The social department and psycho-social department especially helped to boost my morale. During my stay there, friends from home and abroad were sending financial support out of love. There was no financial problem, and Oxfam International was covering the expenses from the hospital to the rehabilitation center.

Early Challenges at Rehabilitation

While staying in rehabilitation, soon after making friends for some time, my old habit started to resurface. The bad habit of substance use. Daily mingling with friends, I started smoking cigarettes and other things to hide my pain while having fun. But the atmosphere then was

different. Some friends had broken their backs from being hit by oxen, some had fallen off cliffs while being chased by wild boars, some had fallen from trees, and some were in critical condition from vehicle accidents. And we were all from different parts of Nepal. But everyone was happy to be in one place and get to know each other. Why wouldn’t we be happy? Every activity in rehabilitation was very timely. Therapy (Occupational and Physical), music, yoga, sports, Sunday morning therapy by peer counselors - everything was good. And after finishing every activity, we like-minded friends would gather in one place and share our stories with each other. And after going there, I learned that even sitting in a wheelchair, one can play every game. I was especially drawn to wheelchair basketball. Even when I was in school, I used to play in Inter Valley School Basketball Tournaments. Maybe that’s why wheelchair basketball attracted me.

Discovering New Talents and Opportunities

While staying at the rehabilitation center, I was quite agile compared to other friends. I was able to quickly learn the work taught by our sirs and madams. Even while staying at the rehabilitation center, I managed to perform a dance for the ASCON Program despite being ill. And we had started playing basketball daily. While lying in bed, remembering drawing pictures in childhood, I started drawing again. And after a 5-6 month stay, I asked for leave to celebrate Dashain at my brother’s house. Right after Dashain ended, I returned to the rehabilitation center. But after 1-2 days, the chairman along with the social department and other department sirs and madams there offered me an opportunity to work as a Peer Counselor. I accepted it without hesitation. I got the chance to gain a lot of experience by working for more than 4 years. I used to teach what I knew especially about Sexuality and Fertility after injury under Psycho-social counseling. Rekindling Creativity Through Art and Sports And we had our own wheelchair basketball team. To keep myself as busy as possible, I started bringing back the thoughts I had forgotten. I started drawing the dreams I had seen while lying on the hospital bed. As I started receiving praise from nurses and patient attendants, I became even more enthusiastic.

And that’s how my second life truly began. The drawings rekindled my sinking life. I started keeping myself as busy as possible. And when I got to counsel patients who had given up like me, I felt proud. I felt like I could do something in life now too.

Facing Social and Financial Struggles

A few years later, buying a four-wheeled scooter made it easier for me to come and go to my brother’s house in Kathmandu. Before that, I used to go every week for 3-4 days by taking a taxi, but it was very expensive. Riding the four-wheeled scooter was as convenient as it was uncomfortable because whether in traffic jams or stopped anywhere else, people around would stare at me, and they still do, our Nepali friends. Sometimes it felt like people were making fun of me and my scooter. Still, I used to go mostly on Fridays and Saturdays to meet family. To focus more on art, I started taking classes in Thamel, three days a week. While working and drawing, finally, the thought of doing an academic course came, and I searched for many wheelchair-accessible colleges. Finally, I enrolled in “Sirjana College of Fine Arts”. After facing difficulties commuting daily from Sanga, Kavre, I eventually quit my job at the rehabilitation center. Although there were difficulties accessing classrooms and toilets in college, I continued my studies because brothers and sisters helped a lot. The brothers and sisters were very friendly and helpful.

Overcoming Housing Challenges in Kathmandu

Now I had to stay in Kathmandu to study because commuting daily from Kavre to Kathmandu had become very problematic, especially for me, a person with physical disabilities. So I searched for a room to rent in many places in Kathmandu, but couldn’t find just one room; the whole flat system made it very difficult for us single men. So I decided to take a whole flat. Again, flats were found in many places. But most landlords would frown and make various excuses when they heard “disabled”. After four months of searching, I got a room in a newly constructed house in Manmaiju, waiting for 2 months. But having to pay the full flat rent monthly brought another difficulty. I had come to Kathmandu after quitting my job. Although some foreign aid came, I started facing financial

problems due to college fees and room rent. Even if I made paintings, it’s hard to find buyers for a new artist’s art. And even if found, it was difficult to recover even the cost of paint and paper. Many acquaintances would only ask for free paintings. My financial situation started becoming very weak. Friends thought Kesh Bahadur Gurung had no shortage of money, but what did they know about my inner story. The monthly room rent also started exceeding the fixed amount including electricity and water bills. When it became very difficult for me, I decided to leave the flat too. After struggling through two years of +2 studies, my brother Dambar arranged a small house for me to stay, and only then did things start to become a bit easier. A New Beginning with Academic Pursuits My name also came out for admission to Tribhuvan University. After I had paid all the fees and went to college for admission, I found out that it was free for me, but I had already paid the fees because I didn’t know earlier. Although it’s free to enroll in government colleges, it’s very difficult in other matters - neither can you go to class nor can you ask anyone anything. When going to inquire about studies, you can neither meet any teachers nor reach the classroom by walking yourself.

Building Confidence and Resilience Through Art

Now I’m enjoying painting and studying this subject at the bachelor’s level, it has also helped me as a therapy. I have a desire to collaborate with other friends by involving them in resilience workshops using this skill and medium of art that I have. And these days, I often think about how it would be if I could exhibit my paintings and the artworks created from resilience workshops together in the future.

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Embracing Independence and Self-Confidence

Some of my daily routine is also spent on basketball. I've become able to cook and eat on my own. I can do my own work. But from the state of disability before to the current situation, the self-confidence in me doesn't let anyone's gaze affect me. Now I feel confident that I can even face 4-5 people alone if necessary. I realize that strength lies not in physical power but in self-confidence. I have embraced the new me in my second life. In every step I take, I find myself. Whatever situation comes, I will keep moving forward.



Story 7 Nabin Worst Nightmare of My Life

Introduction to a Healthy Life

I was a healthy, strong person until 2076-2-32. I grew up in a village, so I used to climb trees, swim in the river, and play football, which was one of my favorite hobbies.

The Accident

One night, I was involved in a severe accident. I don't remember how it happened, but when I woke up in a hospital bed after eight days, my parents told me about the accident. I had hit a pole at midnight. I was completely unconscious for eight days and unaware of what was happening to me. I was unable to move my legs and one hand. I couldn't sit up; my parents had to hold me and shift me on the bed. I was being fed food and medicine, and it seemed like it was just a matter of time—a few days, weeks, or months—before my legs and hand would function again. However, while my hand recovered, my legs did not, even after treatment and rehabilitation.

Recovery and Independence

Thanks to my parents, who were strong when I was weak, I chose to live rather than die. A big thanks to my therapists, who taught me how to be independent: how to sit up on my own, balance myself, eat, wear clothes without help, use the restroom, bathe, sit up from the bed, and use the wheelchair.

Reflection on the Journey

It has been more than five years since my accident, and I still wonder what the next five years will bring—hopefully better things. The journey wasn't easy. I have met some fabulous people along the way and hope to meet many more. Having gone through a near-death experience and now being able to live each day happily,

I often think about the possibility of walking again or having a better recovery if I had been taken to the hospital properly.

Improper Handling of Injuries

In most road traffic accidents, injuries are worsened due to improper handling of the injured person. After the accident, there is less chance of damage, but it increases when the injured person is taken to the hospital incorrectly. The injured person should be taken to the hospital with proper techniques to ensure safety. They should be placed on a stretcher with a pillow under the neck and secured to avoid movement. My bad luck was that after my accident, the police took me in a police van without a stretcher, and my body was not straight. I was taken quickly and improperly, with no safety measures.

The Impact of Improper Transport

Sometimes, I recall and think that if I had been taken properly, I might have had a better recovery and less damage. Schools, colleges, ambulance services, and police should have this knowledge to prevent similar injuries in the future.

