

ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight

Birkha Thapa



Birkha Thapa, 2014

Birkha is an ESOL student who was born in Bhutan, but lived for many years in a refugee camp in Nepal. Birkha has lived in the United States for 2 years. He has a wife and 4 year old daughter. Birkha plans to study engineering science at MCC. Birkha writes about his story from the 1990s, when many Bhutanese citizens of Nepali descent were forcibly removed from Bhutan.

Away Forever

According to George Lansdowne, “To die and part is a less evil; but to part and live, there, there is a torment.”

It was a full moon night. The door knocked from outside many times at midnight. I was deep in sleep before I heard the loud knocking sound. The sound seemed like someone had thrown a kilogram of stones on the door from outside. I woke up from my sleep by this sound. My heart started to beat faster than the normal heart beat. I was feeling that my body was shivering. Again the door started to knock loudly.

I woke up from the bed and listened very carefully. Finally I heard, “Dailo Khol” which means “Open the door.” I looked around my room. My room was totally dark. My home had no electric connection. I woke up from bed and lit an oil lamp. My little 5 year old brother was snoring near me. My parents’ room was just behind my room.

As soon as I got up from my bed, I knew that my father and mother had already gone near the door to

open it. I ran and went near them. My mother’s face had already turned to bluish red. My mum held my hand. My father was in position to fight against those people who were knocking at the door. Probably he might have thought that they were thieves. My father told mother to go to my room and take care of me and my small brother. We went inside the room, and my mother started to peep from my room.

My father opened the door. As soon as my father opened the door four policemen came inside our house. Two of them caught my father’s hands. My mother saw that scene and ran very fast towards them and asked them about why they were arresting my father. One policeman said in harsh words that my father was involved in the anti-government party.

My mother started to cry and said that he wasn’t involved in any party. My father also explained to them about his daily life activities hoping to not get arrested. Even my nine year-old mind knew that

my father was innocent. He worked at a farm all day. But those policemen didn’t listen to anything and took my father to jail. My mother cried the whole night and I did not fall asleep.

After one week the Bhutan government released my father from jail on the condition that we would leave the country within two days. If we didn’t leave the country, they threatened to put my father in the jail for the rest of his life. My father and mother cried a lot.

So, on 1st January, we left all of our all belongings and crossed the southern border of the country and stepped on the land of India. We lived in India for seven days. Next, we went to the country Nepal and settled in a refugee camp. The name of my refugee camp was Timai.

At Timai, there were 1500 huts and the population was above 4000. Food, shelter, education and health facilities were provided by United Nation Higher Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). All of the huts in the

refugee camp were built from bamboo sticks and the roofs were made from plastic.

People who lived in the refugee camp were not allowed to go outside the perimeter of the camp without the permission of the camp administrator. People were not allowed to go outside the camp to work, but some people used to go outside camp illegally to earn some money.

UNHCR provided school in the refugee camp up to grade 10.

After grade 10, students were sent outside the camp for two years to complete high school. But after high school, all students were jobless. We had no citizenship, so we were not allowed to go outside the camp for any job.

Still the image of my village in Bhutan is sticking in my brain. Memories of my house, our large farmland, the river and ponds are still hitting my heart. I'm sure that those images will never be swept away from my mind and heart

throughout my lifetime wherever I go.

I was nine years old when I started my refugee life. I was almost twenty-nine year old when I left the refugee camp. It was a very painful and bitter life that I spent in that refugee camp.

Note: All of Birkha's family members resettled in the United States of America in 2012 after spending 20 years in the refugee camp in Nepal.



ESOL Voices a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. This semester, we are highlighting students from Asian countries. Look for a new story in the Tribune each month. We hope you will find these stories interesting and inspiring.

Katie Leite & Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program, April/May 2014
