

# INTRODUCTION



## हाम्रा कथाहरु Our Stories

Bhutan (འབྲུག་རྒྱལ་ཁབ།) and Nepal (नेपाल) are landlocked countries situated in the Himalayas. They both have the Tibet Autonomous Region of China on their northern borders and India to the south and are separated by the Indian state of Sikkim.

It's not known exactly when Nepalese people began to settle in Bhutan, but it's probably centuries ago. In 1989, the King of Bhutan proclaimed a policy of 'One Nation, One People', which placed cultural and linguistic restrictions on Nepali-speaking Bhutanese. These restrictions included banning traditional Nepali clothing and enforcing the traditional dress of the ruling Drukpa ethnic group. The Nepali language was outlawed, and children were banned from learning it at school. Only Dzongkha, the official national language of Bhutan, was allowed. In the 1990s, the Bhutan government began a regime of ethnic cleansing by violently expelling more than 100,000 people of Nepalese origin, many of whom had been living in Bhutan as citizens.

The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese who were forced to leave trekked on foot to the Indian border, from where they made their way across Sikkim and into Nepal. However, the Nepal government did not consider them to be Nepali citizens, which left them stateless.

As refugees in Nepal, they mostly had to fend for themselves, building huts on land provided for them with whatever materials they could find. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assisted the Nepal government to build seven refugee camps, but conditions there were hard, with ramshackle huts and inadequate supplies of food and medicines. The refugees languished in the camps for years, sometimes for decades, before being resettled around the world. Most were sent to the United States; others settled in Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway and Britain.

Since 2009, Albury has become one of the largest resettlement areas for Nepali-speaking refugees in regional Australia.

This project presents the memories, journeys and aspirations of three generations of the Rimal and Sapkota families, Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees who have made Albury their home.

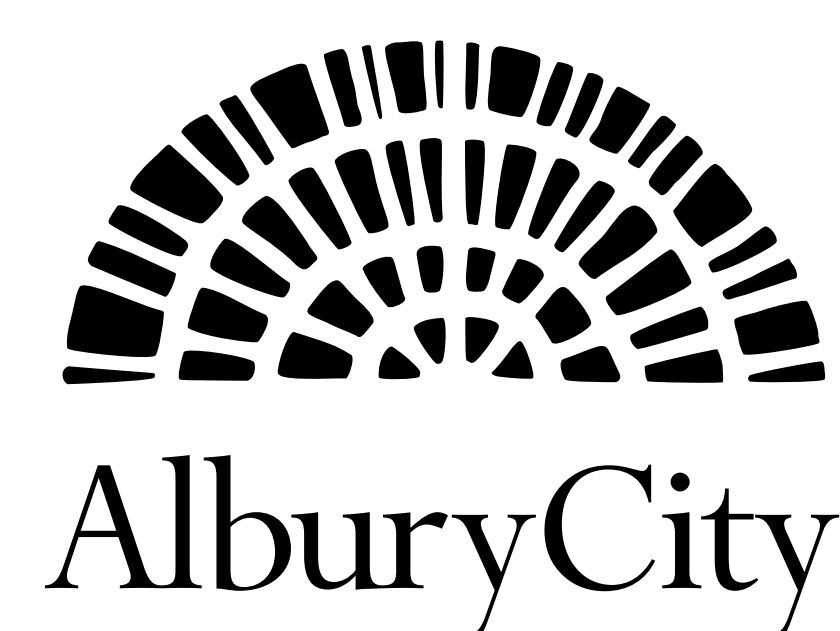
The stories featured in this exhibition were recorded during oral history interviews with each family member. The words are their own and give heartfelt, first-hand insights into the experiences, achievements and culture of these remarkable members of the Albury community.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was made possible through the generosity of the Rimal and Sapkota families who have shared their experiences, homes, objects and images as part of this exhibition. The exhibition was developed, and project managed by the Albury LibraryMuseum with the generous support of the Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau. The films featured in this exhibition were created by Helen Newman of Nomad Films. The oral histories were captured by Featherweight Projects.

Graphic design services were provided by Julia Fin of Fin Design. Translation services were provided by Kedar Sapkota.

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# RIMAL FAMILY



Lachi Rimal & Ganga Ram Rimal  
लच्छी रिमाल गंगाराम रिमाल



Robina Rimal  
रोबिना रिमाल

Rowena Rimal  
रोविना रिमाल

Rahar Raj Rimal  
रहर राज रिमाल



Radhika Rimal & Durga Rimal  
राधिका रिमाल दुर्गा रिमाल

# BEGINNINGS

## LIFE IN BHUTAN



Remote farm Bhutan  
Image Credit: Mark Dozier



Lachi tending the family garden  
AlburyCity Collection



Ganga in the family vegetable garden  
AlburyCity Collection



Map of Bhutan, highlighting Dagana district, birthplace of Ganga

“My name is Ganga Ram Rimal, I was born in the Imire Dagana district of southern Bhutan. When I was little, I was born in a very low-income family. When I was around 5 or 6 years old, I started doing all of the house chores, from cooking to feeding my brothers and siblings. My father used to go for up to seventy days to serve the government of Bhutan to construct the road, while I looked after the family. During those times, I did all the chores like looking after the cows and sheep, I had to do everything, and around that time there were no clocks, so it was when the roosters crowed early morning around 3am to 3:30am I woke up to cook morning meals for the cows and all the animals, I cut the grass, took the animals out for grazing, farming work, everything.

I first married when I was 11 years old. When I was 15, my first wife passed away. Then my grandfather died in the same year. I faced a lot of struggle and suffering. When I was 16, I took care of all the cows and animals, and in my free time I worked in carpentry and building. At first, I built beds and similar furniture, and then when I was around 17 to 18 I started working on houses.

As I was born in remote Bhutan, there were no schools, and since I was the oldest, I had to keep the household together, I had no time to go to study. When I was 19, I married again, to my current wife.

In Bhutan from my knowledge, before 1960-1962, there were no roads, not even in the Thimphu capital, but people brought the parts for a Jeep, carrying the parts, the engines on top of horses and donkeys from there, and joined the Jeep back together, and we started building out the road from Phuentsholing for seventy days of compulsory voluntary work, my father and everyone else helped build the road, and before that there was nothing there.”

**Ganga**

“When I was little, I worked as a shepherd, I stayed at the farm, and when I was around 9 to 10 years old, I grazed the cows, milking the cows and cutting the grass.

I didn't grow up with my siblings, I was only with them until I was 6 or 7 years old. That was when my older brother married, so we were separated since young, and so I was alone. My parents were very rich, we didn't struggle or suffer much.

My husband's uncle had married my sister, and that's how we (Ganga and Lachi) knew each other. We didn't see each other much (before marriage), we had seen each other for 15 days. At that time, it was arranged marriages, and the parents decided the marriage, and that was that.

In all that time there has been nothing bad between us, we've never argued with each other.”

**Lachi**

“ I first married when I was 11 years old. When I was 15, my first wife passed away. Then my grandfather died in the same year. I faced a lot of struggle and suffering ... ”

Ganga

Zhemgang

# DISPLACEMENT

## LEAVING BHUTAN



The Rimal family at Nepali refugee camp  
Albany City Collection

"I couldn't remember all the things (from Bhutan), but still I remember what my parents said to me. We stayed in India for a couple of days and then we went from there to the camp. In 1991, we settled in Maidar camp with my sister [...] my two brothers, mom and dad and my little sister. After arrival she (sister) passed away. Then after a year, we moved from there to the Beldangi camp and we settled there for twenty years."

**Radhika**

"Now around that time in the beginning (early 1980s), it wasn't like it is now ... you could say we were independent, we could wear the traditional clothes of our own culture, we Nepali people wore our traditional Nepali clothing, we also wore tika (religious symbol worn on forehead). From 1986 the government said that the people in Bhutan should have a single language (Dzongkha). When leaving Bhutan, there was lots of agitation, the government became a dictatorship, imposing the One Nation policy, and Nepali books were burnt. I had only heard of the agitation, and what had happened, but after I went back, they (the police) told me that people like us who wouldn't accept the new policies had to go away, since we lived in a remote area, we were not aware of this. Later, we left because they forced us to."

Even after them (the police) saying all of that, we were stubborn and didn't leave. I was the only Bhutanese citizen in our family, everyone else, my wife and all the children were not citizens. And then when they said to leave, we left on the 17th or 18th of April (1992), taking the children."

**Ganga**

"(Another reason we left) When the Dzongda (district head) came around, we had to give two or three girls. And in that time, the grown-up girls used to live in the forest to protect themselves ... Some of the women, they gave birth when they came to Nepal and they were pregnant back in Bhutan due to sexual harassment from the officer there."

**Lachi**

"We left Bhutan, the children were small, I grabbed her (Lachi) by the hand and carried my youngest daughter, and we brought boxes with clothes to wear. We walked for two days, up steep routes, we spent nights in caves since it rained a lot in the night. There were about ten or twelve families with us. We walked for two days to the border and stayed there for six to seven days. Then from India a truck took the eleven families including us to Nepal. (Travelling) from the afternoon to all night we then made it to Kakarbhitta (the gateway of eastern Nepal)."

From there we had to get checked at the gate, since we came from hilly areas, it was quite hot there, the children were hungry and worn out like dried saag (grass), and we got checked for two hours, and they gave us Malaria shots, and then they let us go."

Then from Kakarbhitta we arrived at Shanishchare Patri at the Morung District late at night. When we made it there, a lot of people were already there, and we were all in the middle of the jungle. We stayed there, and recognised a few people there, my wife's father and mother were there, and the brothers, we stayed with them. In the morning, we realised the place was quite dirty. Then the day after, we did some management, they gave us a block of land to build a hut, we cut down the trees and bushes, and built a small hut. We bought tarpaulins to cover the roof."

"I can still hear the noise of the cows from when we left to this day. I had never walked such a long road, and all night the rain would beat against us. In the morning after I had eaten we arrived at Kali Khola and stayed there, there were small basic huts there. Then from Kali Khola, I became very ill, my youngest daughter also became ill, we didn't get to drink water, and then we arrived at Kakarbhitta (the entry gateway of eastern Nepal)."

When we arrived in the camp at late night, it was very dark when they dropped us off, I didn't know where they had dropped us off, my brother had gone to get me, and my dad was there looking after our belongings."

**Lachi**

“Life was very tough, painful and emotional at the same time. I had days without food, clothes and shelter. I suffered from malnutrition and lot of children died ... ”

**Durga**

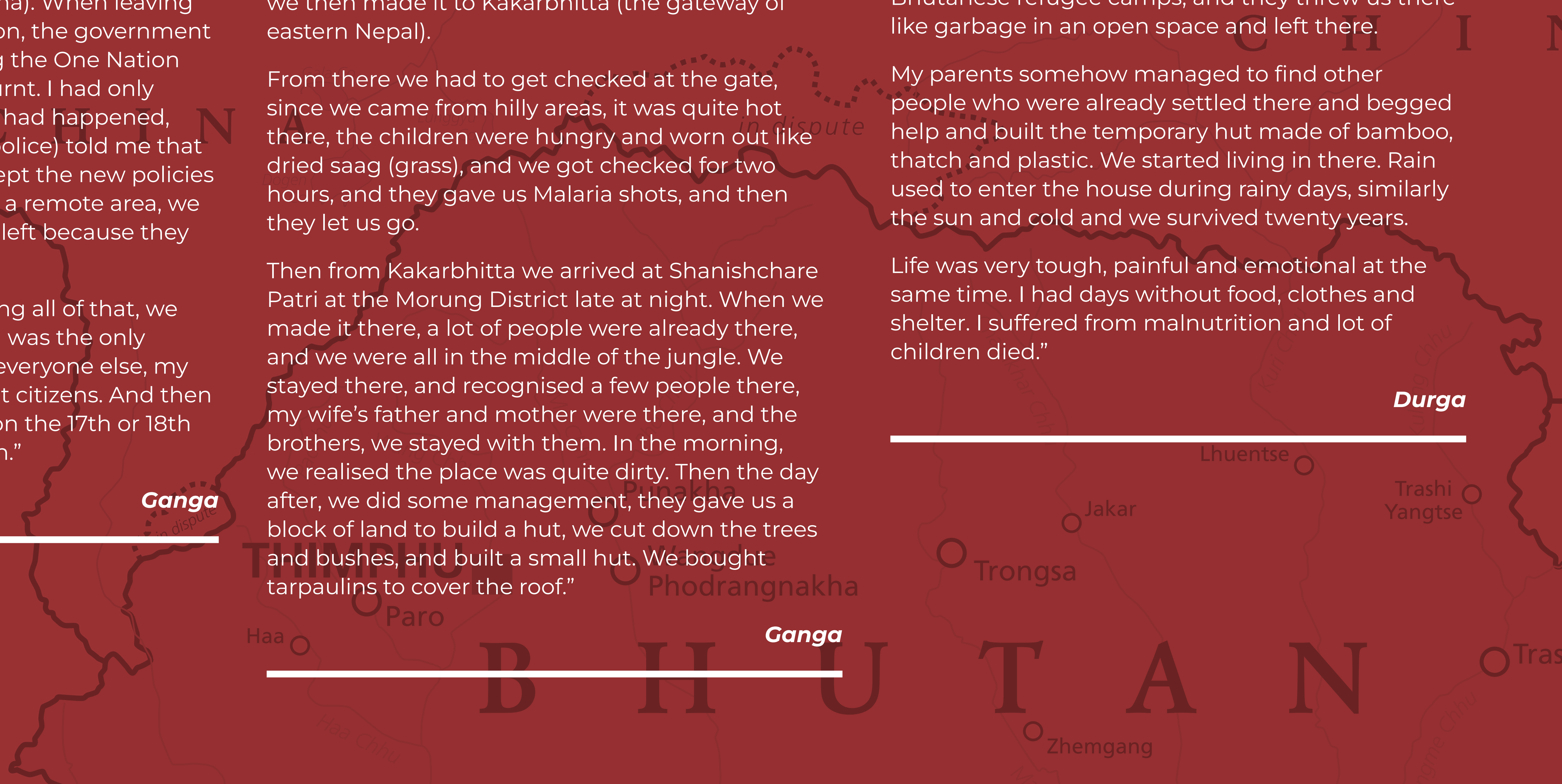
"It was one morning of April 1992. My mother lit the candle and left it inside our house. Likewise, dad let the cattle go away from the shed attached to our house. He then carried a wood box that could be filled with important documents, I guess, and started walking in silence but full of tears in his eyes. My mother was also carrying another wooden box and my baby sister on top of the box followed him and we other four children followed them. I still remember we walked continuously two days by forest, hills, grassland and finally reached the border of Bhutan and India."

After staying a few weeks there, we were placed in the open loading truck along with eleven other families and roughly more than fifty individuals and their belongings. The journey was very hard and tough. After many hours of trip, which was fun to me as a child, but now I realize it was one of the hardest journeys in my life, we were brought to the stone part of Nepal in Morang district and the place was called Shanishchare, one of seven Bhutanese refugee camps, and they threw us there like garbage in an open space and left there."

My parents somehow managed to find other people who were already settled there and begged help and built the temporary hut made of bamboo, thatch and plastic. We started living in there. Rain used to enter the house during rainy days, similarly the sun and cold and we survived twenty years."

Life was very tough, painful and emotional at the same time. I had days without food, clothes and shelter. I suffered from malnutrition and lot of children died."

**Durga**

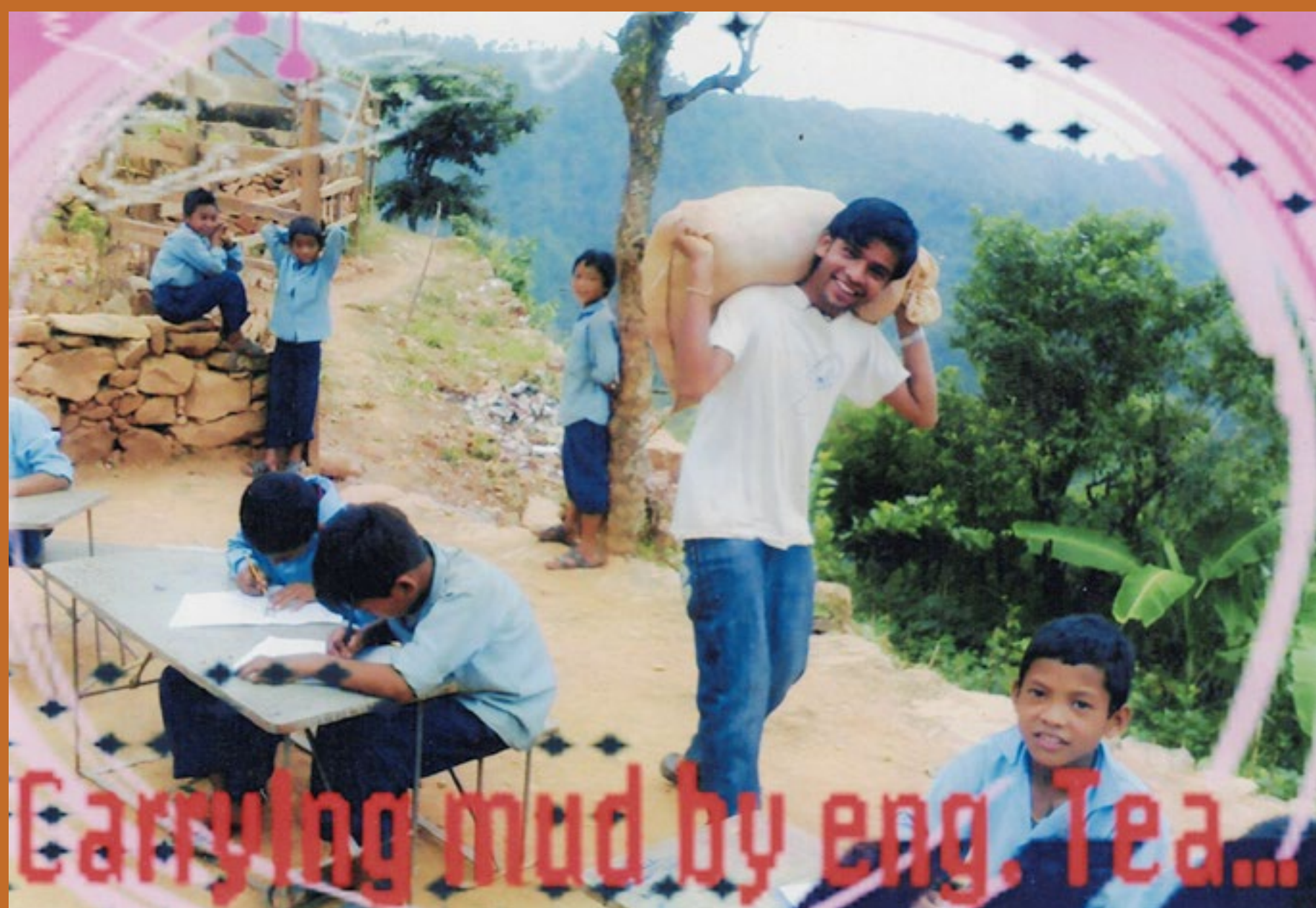


# AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

## NEPALI REFUGEE CAMPS



Image taken on the day of Durga and Radhika's wedding  
AlbanyCity Collection



Durga at work whilst living in the Nepali refugee camp  
AlbanyCity Collection



Radhika with family members at Nepali refugee camp  
AlbanyCity Collection

"We came from Bhutan, to a very hot place, and the tarpaulins would heat up and it was uncomfortable to stay under them, we had lived around lakes before, a cold place, like comparing here to Tasmania, we lived in a place where it would snow, and then we came to a hot place in the camp. We didn't recognise anything there, we didn't recognise what the food was like. In Bhutan the children would eat yoghurt and drink milk, when we left, they did give us rice because of our situation, but not food that people needed, it was very difficult.

Around June/July, it was super-hot, and a lot of strong wind would come and lift all of the plastic and tarpaulins in the air, we had to try and hold them to keep the hut together, and there was lots of rain.

It was difficult, when we first arrived there, for the first two to three months there were temporary schools inside of the camp, where they were taught on open ground outside, it was very difficult, there was also a struggle for food, because there were a lot of people living there, it was very dirty and there was a lot of rubbish, there were no toilets, and the kids were taught outside on the dirt floor.

Food was a big issue, the food they provided was not sufficient for the adults in the camp, they provided 400 grams of rice for each individual person. At first, they only gave rice, but then they started to provide potatoes and other vegetables later on."

**Ganga**

"I started my education there (Nepali refugee camp) and finished my year 10, which was free of cost because of the selfless volunteering from our educated elders. I then started working as a primary school teacher.

I finished my year 12 at a local private college (and then) I started working as a primary school teacher... later I also worked as a secondary school teacher.

I was continuing my Bachelor of Art by distance learning. But even though we were allowed to work as teachers outside of the refugee camp, we were considered as state less and we had to report back to the camp every few months. We had legal obligations imposed there."

**Durga**

"There was a lot of struggle when we lived in the camp, when it started raining, everything would get wet and flood, lots and lots of struggle. And there was only one type of food, there was nothing else, we didn't get to eat anything else. And when we went outside, they used to say that 'the Bhutanese are here' to us."

**Lachi**

"We used to go out with the children after class and used to play soccer. Mostly, I used to go to the riverbank and catch fish. Also, after school, I used to go to the riverbank and break stones with my brother to earn money. I started when I was probably seven or eight years old. That's how I used to afford pens and pencils. [...] After school, when I was a teenager, I used to go out in the village to harvest rice and carry hay and make some money to afford study. Life was difficult, I guess, but it was a very happy life."

**Durga**

"I started my school when I was eight years old. From the pre-school to year 10, I started, but still I needed to do some housework. Mum and dad, they were going out to earn money (out of Nepali camp). I needed to cook in the morning. I started cooking from six. I was six years old, I started cooking to feed my brothers and my parents.

I started working from when I was 10 years old to do some harvesting in a local area to earn money. In five days, I earned 10 rupees, which was the first money I earned in my life. That taught me how to save money.

My parents taught me how to save money, and how to be a good human. We didn't have enough money, but still, we were saving some from our pocket.

We got a good education, which is working here now, so that has helped us a lot."

**Radhika**

“

And there was only one type of food, there was nothing else, we didn't get to eat anything else ... ”

Lachi



# A NEW HOME

## ARRIVAL AND ESTABLISHMENT IN AUSTRALIA



Durga and Radhika in the family kitchen  
AlburyCity Collection

“Personally, I felt like I came to a different planet with new culture, new lifestyle, new people. We used to be very friendly with one another. We used to chat with neighbors and the community. But the people seem very isolated here. No one used to talk with us, other than the community members who often used to visit. And Radhika was already eight months pregnant ... but I left her alone in the unit after three days and started supporting other vulnerable community members, especially to bridge that language gap.”

**Durga**

“My name is Rowena and I’m 13 years old and I was born in Australia... I tell my friends I was born in Australia and raised here and stuff but I tell them about how my background is Nepali and from Nepal and Bhutan. [...]”

**Rowena**

It makes me feel good that we didn’t have to live like how they (parents and grandparents) lived back then and we have more privilege in Australia here. I liked how like both my parents even though they didn’t have enough they were teachers and my dad was a principal though because they didn’t have a lot growing up but they still achieved their dreams and they became teachers and became a principal (Durga).”

“My brothers, siblings, and maternal families, and family in law, and friends, they all decided to go to America, but I was thinking that we should go to Australia ... At that time, I approached the UNHCR ... they told me that our whole family had to go to the USA, since most of our family, relatives and friends had already gone to the USA.

When I was first in Bhutan, I had worked with cows and horses and sheep that were brought from Australia, and for that I had training for fifteen days in Samchi, and from then I had always wondered how it was like to live in Australia.

After six months they called us again saying that our family was still to go to America ... and so I said that I would either go to Australia or stay in the refugee camp. After that they called me because the immigration team to go to Australia had arrived.”

**Ganga**



Ganga in the family vegetable garden  
AlburyCity Collection



Rowena and Robina practise their soccer skills  
AlburyCity Collection

“When I arrived, I wondered what there was to do, and what there was to see. I was isolated. When I looked over here, there was a road, and if I looked over there, there was the same road, and I was wondering where I was going, I got lost. When I looked at the people here, I had thought that they were my people ... I started getting used to living here and started forgetting about my life in the camp ... I went to TAFE, and also the gardens (in Thurgoona), the TAFE teacher Ruth took us to the gardens (community vegetable garden) and we stayed there, and the people from TAFE introduced us to people. The garden in Thurgoona is very good. First, we grew long beans, pumpkin, zucchini, coriander, cauliflower, asparagus, green vegetables. We used to even cook and eat there.”

**Lachi**

“We arrived in Albury Airport on 8th of February at 4.25 p.m. And there were more than 150 people ready to welcome us like VIPs. There was a white looking lady who put khada (traditional scarf) on us and welcomed us. And there were a few other people such as the Bhutanese community who had already resettled.

One of these ladies said, “Svāgata cha” which means welcome. And it really inspired me. I feel that sense of belonging.”

**Durga**

“He went to help other people. And he told me ‘I will come soon’. But sometimes it took from 10 o’clock till 2 o’clock or 4 o’clock. And I needed to ring. I feel like, oh, where I am? I found it hard to stay behind at home on my own.

There was no one around except for one granny, my dad’s cousin’s auntie. And she came to my place. She helped a little bit and asked me to come and stay with her if I was alone. She’s a lovely woman.”

**Radhika**

“It was a totally hard time. I was missing my parents and my in-laws as well. Because we just came ourselves with three brothers in law. But I left my family. There was not any process for my parents when I came to Australia. My in-laws came after two months, but still I feel alone. I say, I have no one in here, no parents. Without parents, I feel so homesick. My Parents-in-law arrived in Australia on the 7th of April. And then on 14th of April, Rowena was born.”

**Radhika**



Robina, Durga, Radhika, Lachi, Rahar Raj, Rowena and Ganga Rimal  
AlburyCity Collection



Memories displayed at the Rimal family home  
AlburyCity Collection

# LOOKING FORWARD

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



Robina and the family cat  
AlburyCity Collection



Durga and his son Rahar Raj  
AlburyCity Collection



Radhika and Durga  
AlburyCity Collection



Ganga and Lachi with their youngest grandchild Rahar Raj  
AlburyCity Collection

"I'm trying to get into sports and be a famous footballer...I've been playing since I was five and right now, I play for Rep and Murray and United."

**Rowena**

"We have to teach them (grandchildren), because it is our own culture, we have never been to school, we don't understand English, and how are we meant to teach the children (if they don't understand Nepali)?

We also have to teach them our traditions, we have to teach that we had done this, and that they should do that, we have to teach them that. Each family has their own tradition. We should not let our culture die out, we have to teach them, for the children's futures.

For me, I am happy to be in Australia, I have nothing to complain about except for the fact that I never learnt how to speak English, that is something I struggle with, I can't understand. Nor when I learnt Nepali, I can only speak Nepali.

When I came here, I had three grandchildren, but now there are 13 of us, why should I be unhappy? I have plenty of family."

**Lachi**

"Personally, what I believe is, our culture, which is Nepali culture, and our nationality as an identity, which is Bhutanese. Protecting our nationality, which is Bhutanese and preserving our culture is part of our identity. And it is very important. I do acknowledge that we have some of the stereotypical aspects of our cultural and traditional lifestyle, which we need to avoid and are working on.

There are a lot of beautiful cultural aspects of the Western world. So, we try to balance both to provide the cultural sense of belonging to our girls. So, when they grow up, they will have that (understanding of both cultures) - the way they see the world will be different."

**Durga**

"When I grow up I want to be a veterinarian because I really like animals and I want to help them."

**Robina**

"One day I'd like to go visit Bhutan and see the culture and see how it is there because we don't really practice Bhutanese culture, and we don't celebrate them here because our parents were raised with Nepali culture. I'd like to see the different vibe."

**Rowena**

"We aren't able to forget our mother land for life, but at the moment we are not allowed to go back to Bhutan. They wouldn't let us go back, and we wouldn't be able to do anything even if we went back.

When I think back to Bhutan, I remember everything, but it has been over 32 years since we had left, so we have nothing left there now. I do still think about it because it was where I was born, where I played when I was little, a lot of memories back there, but there is no point in going back now."

**Ganga**

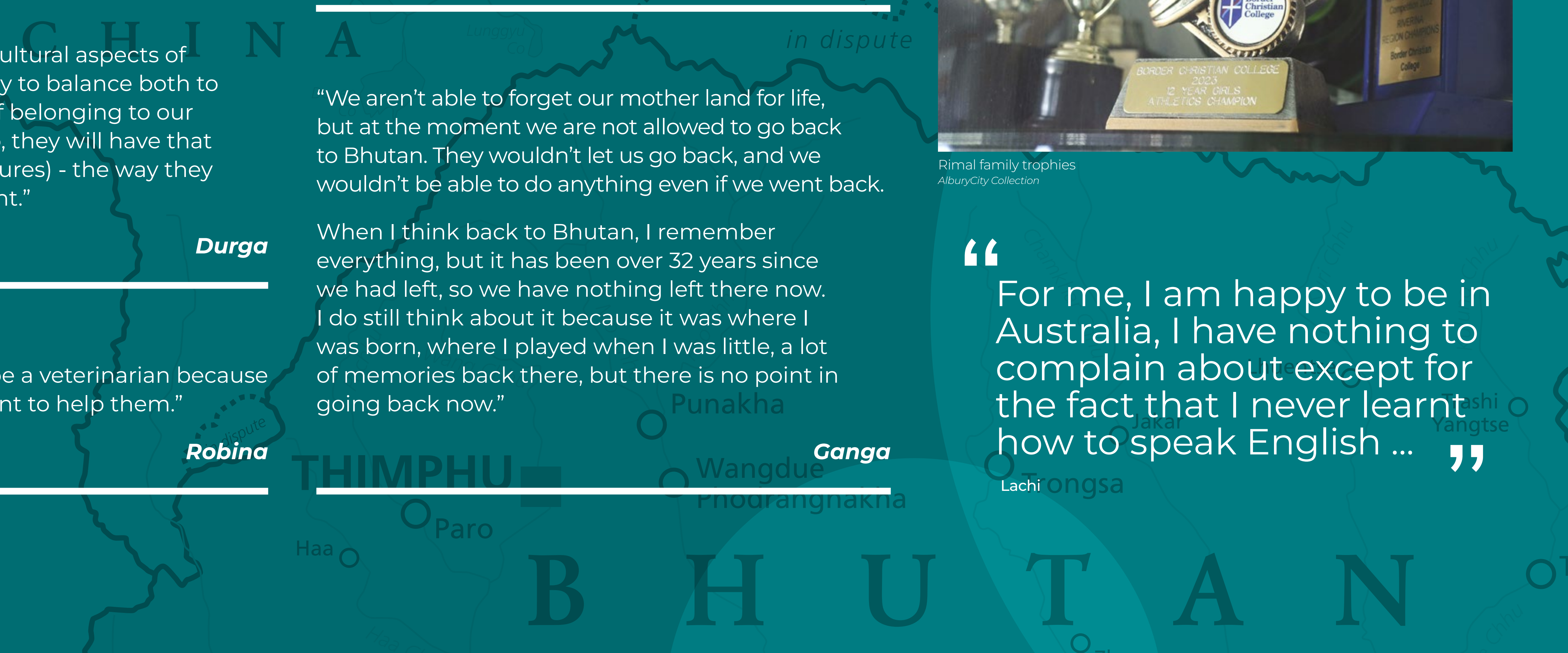


Rimal family trophies  
AlburyCity Collection

“

For me, I am happy to be in Australia, I have nothing to complain about except for the fact that I never learnt how to speak English ... ”

Lachi Ongsa



# SAPKOTA FAMILY



Nar Maya Sapkota  
नरमाया सापकोटा

Laxmi Sapkota  
लक्ष्मी सापकोटा



Utam Sapkota  
उत्तम सापकोटा



Govinda Sapkota  
गोविन्द सापकोटा



Krishna Maya Sapkota  
Khatiwada

कृष्णमाया सापकोटा खतिवडा

Hari Prasad Sapkota

हरिप्रसाद सापकोटा

INDIAN

सापकोटा

OCEAN

TAS

Tasmania



# BEGINNINGS

## LIFE IN BHUTAN



Rural landscape, Tsirang Bhutan  
Photo courtesy of Inside Bhutan



Traditional hand woven winnowing disk used in Bhutan and other parts of Asia  
AlburyCity Collection

“I was born in 1968 in a remote place of Bhutan (Dampfu Tsirang) ... my parents were farmers so I grew up very poor. I used to work very hard in the morning to look after the cows, goats and sheep and then I got a chance to go to school. I started my schooling when I was 11 years old ... (I studied) up to year six in school and then I left the school and went into religious study ... I studied three years there in Sanskrit school. After that we have got some problem with the country ... there is an ethnic cleansing 'one people one nation policy' imposed by the Bhutanese government and then they force us to leave the country”

“

When I was little, I looked after goats, I sang songs and looked after the goats ... and then cows when I became a little older ... ”

Nar Maya

Hari

“

I used to work very hard in the morning to look after the cows, goats and sheep and then I got a chance to go to school ... ”

Hari

“I lived in Bhutan for 50 years, and it was okay ... it was still exciting and joyous living there. When I was little, I looked after goats, I sang songs and looked after the goats ... and then cows when I became a little older. I was 11 years old when I got married, and then I lived at my parents' house for five years, and then after five years I got sent to my new house, and then after seven years I had my first daughter. And then I had a son, but unfortunately miscarriage, and then I had a daughter who is still here today. And then I had my now eldest son, then second eldest, then third son, and then the youngest son. And then I had a daughter, but I experienced another miscarriage.”

Nar Maya

“Hello, Namaste, Jai Sriman Narayana. My name is Govinda Sapkota. I was born in Nepal and I moved to Australia when I was one years old. I'm currently studying in high school, year 11. Growing up, I grew up with the other Aussie kids and my parents used to tell me stories about how they went to school and stuff and how life was when they lived in the refugee camps and how life in Bhutan was different as well. They would share stories about how they would go up the mountain and then go to school.

And then my grandma also tells me stories about like how she looked after the calves, the cows and the sheep, and then how she would sing songs. And she would explain how life would be back then. It's kind of simple right now, but it wasn't as complex as right now.”

Lhuentse

Govinda  
Yanatse



# DISPLACEMENT

## LEAVING BHUTAN



King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, featured here on a Bhutanese bank note, introduced the One Nation, One People policy to Bhutan in 1989

"When we left the country I was 19 years old ... everything what is going on at that time in Bhutan was like being in the ocean ... the Bhutanese government they asked us to snap the photo, laughing photo (for an identity card) like 'be happy always'... but unfortunately we didn't get (citizenship) because of the name difference ... and they just forced us to leave the country. We hired a very big truck like lorry, and it was maybe one and or two days journey ... we traveled all the way India and then they just put us on the border, the eastern part of Nepal. We were at that time six people in our family."

**Hari**

"I was little girl, but I knew that at schools they burn the Nepalese books and then they forced (us to wear) Bhutan's national dress ... and forced a one people, one nation policy ... they forced us to wear the Baku and Kira at schools, supermarket, anywhere we go. In 1992 they bring in different things, like they do not keep Nepalese people in the country, so they force us to leave the country. In Bhutan there are two different nationalities the Nepalese and the Drukpas and only Drukpas (were allowed to) live in Bhutan and all Nepalese forced to leave the country. Though I was a little girl, I still remember my parents hired a small truck and they put in whatever things they need for the day ... I was only around nine ten years old and I follow parents and all the siblings and stay in the trucks and then went to Nepal in the refugee camp"

**Krishna**



Nepali religious text  
AlburyCity Collection

“

I was little girl, but I knew that at schools they burn the Nepalese books and then they forced (us to wear) Bhutan's national dress ... ”

Krishna



Krishna wears the traditional Sari and Hari wears Nepali cap known as a Topi  
AlburyCity Collection

B H U T A N

Zhemgang

# AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

## NEPALI REFUGEE CAMPS



Beldangi refugee camp, Nepal  
Omar Havana, Getty Images



School students in class, Beldangi refugee camp  
Prakash Mathema, Getty Images

"I got married in 2001 and then we have a baby girl, born in 2002. I have no chance to go outside the camp to work as I have to look after my girl and then do the housework ... plus I study year 11 and 12 once she (was) born. I went to India to complete my year 12 and then came back and did maternal child health care course from the camp. Also, I did volunteer things in the camp to distribute the plants, to do the home garden, lots of things ... in 2006 another boy born and in 2008 younger one born and I have three children. It was hard when they (were) born, it's very hard because of the dust ... and children getting easily sick ... they got asthma because of the dust, and we didn't get asthma treatment in the camp because of the basic treatment ... so we have to go outside the camp. We also did not have proper nutritious food and vegetables, or proper clothes to wear in the winter, in the summer. If we need proper clothes or proper food to eat we have to work hard and only Hari is working in the schools getting five hundred rupees (approximately \$9 AUD) in a month."

**Krishna**

"When we came to Nepal we were divided into seven different refugee camps ... there were more than 40,000 people in our camp (Beldangi - I) ... Slowly the UNHCR started to look after us and Caritas Nepal provided education. We got very good education but only basic medication and very basic food ... it was very hard ... we get very little in a fortnight, maybe four or five kgs rice and some veggies ... we have to use that for fifteen days so it is very hard for us and the happiest thing was that the we got the very good education.

[...] When we arrived there was no anything, no roof or fence only the open ground. Under the tree they just left us, and they provided some bamboo to build the hut ... and they provided the small piece of plastic fit for half of the roof ... we stayed there in that camp nearly three months and then they shipped us to another big camp. There they provided again the bamboo and some thatch to make the roof for the hut and we again made the bamboo strip wall.

[...] One day the fire caught, and maybe half of the camp was burned. It was very hard there ... with many difficulties in the camp like sometimes fire, sometimes the rain, rainwater got inside the house and sometimes people just come to steal ... these were the very hard things that we experienced in our camp life."

**Hari**

"In the refugee camp houses are built out of bamboo and plastic roof. Luckily, we found one of our neighbors there and he supported us to build our small house. One night there was heavy rain and all the plastic roof blew away and lots of rain came inside the house, in our bed and it was so hard. We held the plastic either side of the corner of the house - mom's holding one side dad holding other side and other siblings holding different parts of the roof. We spent the whole day holding the plastic. I will never forget that life, it was so hard."

Siddhartha **Krishna**

"I was studying in the camp, my brother was teaching at that time and there was a vacancy for teachers and he told me because I had got the Sanskrit education (I should apply) ... I did the interview ... and after twenty two days they released the result, and I got third position ... and I was appointed as a general teacher ... I taught there for nine years as a general teacher and during that period I faced many problems with teaching the children (for example) in one class there were forty students and they didn't get any proper food, proper clothing, so it was very hard. Sometimes they became ill, sick and then they had to leave the class. The school was the same structure (as our huts) like thatched roof and bamboo strips of wood, so it was not good during the rainy season ... After (nine years) they upgraded me to the sector in charge, that is a principal and twelve teachers were under my leadership ... When I was a principal the teachers, they are very cooperative, they work very hard to make our people, our children, successful and provided very good education. The good thing about the education was they trained the teacher and then those who finish, they provide a higher education, they provide scholarship and when they finish their higher education they should return to the camp, and they should do the volunteer work they should teach the coming generation."

**Hari**

“ When we arrived there was no anything, no roof or fence only the open ground. Under the tree they just left us, and they provided some bamboo to build the hut ... ”

Hari

"I don't remember entirely, but I do remember some snippets, some good memories, and some traumatic memories as well. Growing up, I don't remember too much of like three years, but once my brothers were born, relatives have told me that I used to be very excited and would usually take care of them. So, in Nepal, we have cradles, but made out of, I think, bamboo, and you use a string to pull it and push it, to put the kids to sleep. So, that was my job, and relatives used to tell me that I used to sing my brothers to sleep...I used to sing a lot, and I was like that creative kind of kid growing up.

[...] I spent my childhood with my cousins next door, and our childhood consisted of us just going out to play ... We had a pretty simple childhood. We used to play with rocks and rubber bands, and I know it sounds boring, but there's actually Nepalese games using rocks and also rubber bands. They used to tie rubber bands up to make this little ball of rubber bands. It bounces around, and you used to play games with your hands and feet.

[...] Our school was interesting. I started from like the pre-primary class, and by the time I think I was about to head into year two, before coming here. So that was like my schooling in Nepal, from like primary, pre-primary to year two. The school was like a walk away from like where we lived ... it was like a large bamboo hut, basically with no adequate equipment or anything ... the only thing that I can remember from school is that if you didn't do your homework, they would slap us with bamboo sticks ... I didn't really learn much. It was very forceful and strict and violent as well."

**Laxmi**

# A NEW HOME

## ARRIVAL AND ESTABLISHMENT IN AUSTRALIA

"In 2009 we came to Australia ... our brother-in-law came first, and he was eager to see us. I had three children, they were crying on the plane and it was hard to catch everything ... We came from Nepal to Singapore, Singapore to Sydney and Sydney to Albury. (When we) got off from the plane and looked around we were super excited to see the lights and everything. When we got off from the plane in Albury airport everyone came there to receive us ... volunteers, caseworker and all the other Nepalese people came there to see us, so we are super excited ... They help us to get the children in the car ... (it was) our first time in a proper car, we have been in the car in Nepal as well, but it was very smooth, the smooth road ... (we noticed) lots of food smells different to in the camp."

**Krishna**

"In my lifetime I had never used the plane, I used the first time from Nepal to Australia. I was excited and worried because my two boys, they were crying from Nepal to Australia, the whole journey, so it was hard. When I arrived here my younger brother ... received us with some of the volunteer and case worker and they brought us here (the family home in Albury) and the house was ready, and they told us that this is yours. (I thought) wow, because I have seen the fridge and the dining table, chair, sofa, and the bed, everything (we were) very excited ... They placed the bed like such a way that the quilt that we put over the body it was just flat on the bed and our system is we fold it and leave it on top of the bed, but Aussie's system is to put all (flat). So, I found the pillow was ready there but there was not any quilt, I thought that the patterned one (quilt) is a bed sheet, so I slept all night on the top of the quilt. (The next) morning I (asked) my brother 'where is the quilt?' because I was shivering all the night! So, he came and saw the bed and he was laughing ... he explained, 'this is the quilt, so you just fold it, and you just get inside!' That was a very good experience."

**Hari**



Nar Maya, Krishna, Utam and Hari  
AlburyCity Collection



Hindu shrine in the Sapkota family home  
AlburyCity Collection

“In my lifetime I had never used the plane, I used the first time from Nepal to Australia ...”

Hari

"When we came to Australia we have a house, we have a proper food, everything is here, but challenging thing is the language. We have to speak in English, it's hard, we had limited English, so hard to go to the bank or to the class. We have to struggle hard to get the good English, so our volunteer took us to the TAFE to enroll us to learn the English language. I study up to six months at TAFE and then I enrolled (in the) aged care course ... so I did a aged care course as well as English course together, having three children at home and then two children going to childcare and Laxmi went to school she start from kinder. In the morning it's very challenging to get the lunch boxes ready and ourself to get ready and taking the kids to the childcare and going to the school. It was very challenging (having the two boys in childcare) they always cry, unsettled because of the new faces, new environment ... So I went in the class and then after a couple of hours the childcare soon rang us (to ask) 'could you please come here to settle your child' so I come back to the childcare and settle them, and then went back again."

**Krishna**



Reciting Sanskrit hymns as a family  
AlburyCity Collection



Krishna, Nar Maya and Laxmi  
AlburyCity Collection

# A NEW HOME

## ARRIVAL AND ESTABLISHMENT IN AUSTRALIA



Hindu shrine in the Sapkota family home.  
AlburyCity Collection

“We hold Sanskrit classes. It’s run by gurus to teach younger kids how to read and recite Sanskrit literature and sometimes I’d help out with teaching the little kids and also my brother, he does a lot of that ... When I was little, I didn’t enjoy it that much. Now, it’s kind of grown on me. I think when I was little, I didn’t have any of these notions about preserving heritage and all that ... Preserving heritage is keeping the traditions that we had in Nepal and being able to practice them in our own homes. I think it’s like being able to act on those traditions as a community as well, like running events, running English (classes), preserving heritages, being able to practice festivals like traditional festivals, keep on doing what’s been done for thousands of years.”

**Utam**

“One time we had a harmony day at our school and I attended in my cultural clothes, like traditional clothes, and I would get a bunch of comments from the teachers and students saying, ‘this is amazing’. I could see the appreciation of our culture ... Even though I was different to everybody else, I was also accepted and involved. When I would bring food to school, it was different cultural foods, I would get a lot of questions saying, ‘where is this food from?’ And I would just say, ‘oh, this is my cultural food’. I would get a lot of questions about my culture. Even, like, we have a hairstyle in our culture, like with this (longer piece) at the back, and I would get a lot of questions about this. And I would just say, ‘oh, it’s part of my religion’. And I could see the curiosity in people.”

**Govinda**



Nar Maya and grandson Utam sitting in Nar Maya’s favourite spot, the family vegetable garden.  
AlburyCity Collection

“I improved my English (at TAFE), and we were very eager to go to the university and with the (help of our) social worker, four boys in our community went to the Latrobe University. We have to do six months bridging course because we are very mature. We finished in four months after that I was admitted into social work degree, Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Human Services; when we finished that four-year course, we were able to admit into the master. I did my double degree up to third year and then unfortunately I had to have open heart surgery ... I finished my Bachelor of Human Services in 2015. (However), I’m not working because of my health problem. I’m a community priest ... I go to the client’s house and they ask me to read and practice the cultural things and rituals ... And looking after the children now they are going to school and she (Krishna) is working.”

**Hari**



Govinda’s harmonium playing accompanies the singing of Sanskrit hymns.  
AlburyCity Collection

“When I came here I experienced luxury. I got to eat out of other places, I found luxury here ... Everything is good here, I got to go on Tirtha (a religious pilgrimage) with my family to pay respects to our ancestors, we came safely back.”

**Nar Maya**



Hari and Krishna share a reading from religious text.  
AlburyCity Collection

“My cousins actually came up to me and told me, ‘oh, you’re going to Australia, it’s going to be so good for you and exciting for you!’ That’s the first time I remember getting my jacket. My parents bought me a new jacket just to come to Australia. I wore that jacket on my journey here.

[...] My first experience of Australia was at the Sydney airport. I opened my eyes and saw all these stores. I had no clue what was going on. And then we got to Albury airport and my uncle picked us up and brought us to our new place. Everything was new, buildings were new, the roads were new, even trees looked new to me. People were new. Language was new. Everything was new and different and bright as well ... I was provided with all these facilities that I didn’t even know existed. Like I stepped into a new world that I didn’t even know that existed. I got provided with a bed. I saw a TV for the first time. Then I got to actually watch TV. We had a new kitchen, fridge. I didn’t even know you stored food in a fridge.

[...] Because of my experience of school in a refugee camp, I was absolutely terrified by the word ‘teacher’ and teachers coming into this new country. I stepped into my first class, and I was of course terrified by the teacher, and everyone around me spoke a different language that I just couldn’t understand, yeah, I felt very sick and anxious on my first day.

[...] I met an ESL teacher who was so supportive and she basically guided me through Australia’s culture, language and everything ... I was lucky enough to receive a scholarship to a private school, so I studied at a private school for my high schooling years.

[...] I did university for my parents and the subjects that I chose, in South Asian communities, young adults they’re often told to study traditional courses and pathways, but I didn’t believe in that because of my creative side, I wanted to do business because I had the understanding and I do have the understanding that business is the future and it was important for me to take that step and do something different in my family so that I can provide my family and hopefully so like my future generation don’t experience the poverty that my past did, so that’s why uni was important for me. It’s that reflection of how my life transformed.

“ I saw a TV for the first time. We had a new kitchen, fridge. I didn’t even know you stored food in a fridge ... ”

Laxmi

# LOOKING FORWARD

## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE



Nar Maya and granddaughter Laxmi  
AlburyCity Collection

"When we came to Australia there is only few (Nepali speaking) peoples and after a few months lots of peoples coming from Nepal ... So, we form a community ... we do have festival once a year like Dasara festival, Deepavali festival and lots of other smaller festival. All the communities get together ... sharing our culture ... sharing our religious things and sharing the food, clothes and music ... Even at home to keep our cultural things we encourage kids to do every day in our house like if they speak English outside the house, it's okay, but inside the house make sure practice our language so that they will not forget our language and keep forever in their life. It is good to know two culture or three cultures and if they go anywhere, they can use their language ... So, they will not lose any things we are still teaching them Nepali language and our religious things. So far, they understand and are eager to learn."

**Krishna**

"I shower every day, and prayer in the morning, and I come and eat rice, and I walk around the garden ... I have already taught my family language, and household rules and customs, they already know about dharma (religion), I've already taught them everything."

**Nar Maya**

"After a long time working in childcare, I got permanent job in 2009, I am still there so hopefully I'll be continuing. In my workplace there are lots of multicultural children having English as a second language (such as) Chinese, Congolese, Bhutanese, Nepalese and Indian. I'm so happy to support them ... I'm really excited to work in this workplace, all the staff are multicultural, so supportive of each other and whenever we need help we talk with each other, support each other... It's so good to help and support the children in their day-to-day life."

**Krishna**

"...I would really like to, even growing up in Australia, I would like to learn even more about my culture. When I learn more about my culture, I can say and express it to all the other people who are curious. That would be a good thing to have [...] I want to make sure that I preserve my culture and history and my parents' history. I want to communicate to, like, my family and others about our religion. So, I want to make sure that it's not lost just in between us."

**Govinda**



Produce from the Sapkota's bountiful vegetable garden  
AlburyCity Collection

“

I've been given all these opportunities and I've been given a choice as well. I get to choose what I want to do with my life, and I will use that choice and take my life forward and fulfill my goals and passions ... ”

Laxmi

"In the refugee camp we were lacking so many resources and the world is full of resources, so it's actually ignited a passion in me to spread that word on how lives can be transformed as I experienced that as a young child. It's ignited a passion in me to advocate for children and spread the word that every child deserves an adequate standard of living, an adequate education, lifestyle.

Hopefully, in the refugee camp, if I get a chance to go back, do something at least for children, encourage to provide them with resources because just as my life changed coming to Australia, I know theirs will ... I've been given all these opportunities and I've been given a choice as well. I get to choose what I want to do with my life, and I will use that choice and take my life forward and fulfill my goals and passions."

**Laxmi**

"My aspirations would be to become a mathematician, but I also think it's important to keep my roots as well because obviously I've grown up with practicing my religion all my life, so it's always going to be part of me and I think I aspire to keep that going as well. After I finish uni, I'm thinking of searching for internships in that, quantitative research, and through those I think I could seize opportunities and if I enjoy it, I could get into teaching as well.

[...] People who hear my story and all our stories should take away that family and heritage is important. We should keep traditions going that have been going for thousands of years and we should stay connected to our roots, I think. Maybe in the future, I'd go back to Nepal. I do want to go back some time to visit the temples again."

**Utam**



Nar Maya wears traditional Nepali jewellery  
AlburyCity Collection



Utam in the family garden  
AlburyCity Collection

Zhemgang

# LEARN NEPALI

Did you know that, according to Census data, Nepali is the second most spoken language in Albury? Here are some common words in English and Nepali that you may wish to learn:

**Hello** – Namsate – नमस्ते

**Thank you** – Dhanyavaad – धन्यवाद

**Please** – Kripaya – कृपया

**Love** – Pyar – प्यार

**Family** – Pariwar – परिवार

**Goodbye** – Namaskar – नमस्कार

**My name is...** – Mero nam ho – मेरो नाम ..... हो

**Delicious!** – Swaadisht – स्वादिष्ट

**Yes** – Ho – हो

**No** – Hoina – होइन

