

An open letter of gratitude to Manjushree Verein

In a gentle way, you can shake the world: I quote Mahatma Gandhi. Dear stakeholders of Manjushree Verein, thank you for actually living up to the quote. Through your selfless deed of supporting and helping children from underprivileged communities to get quality education, you have touched lives of innumerable. And I am one of those touched souls, forever indebted to your kindness.

Every morning before I leave home to attend classes, I look at myself in the mirror and reflect the person I have become. The reflection sometimes takes me back to my most distant memory – the days when I had to struggle for survival in my rural village where I was born. I have come a long way from those days to be able to write this.

The reflection in the mirror reminds me of my achievement in life and academics. I have earned high school certificates, the first in my family to do so. I work as a journalist at a reputed media, again making me the first member of my family to perform technical job. As someone coming from a poor and underprivileged community of rural Nepal, I know I have been extremely fortunate to make such achievements, which is still a distant dream for most of the people back in my village.

However, none of this would have been possible without love and support from Manjushree Verein. I owe everything to the kind hearted people working relentlessly for the Verein. It has given me the opportunity to have quality education, which changed my life. It has also given me the platform upon which I can work to achieve my dreams.

I was born as the fifth child of my parents. My mother was given off for marriage before the age of 18 as child marriage is widely practiced in the rural settlements. I was born as the youngest child to the couple. Before my birth, a sister before me had died from a severe disease in lack of access to treatment. My mother says I also barely survived serious illness during childhood.

When I ask someone who are the first person they remember in their life, most of them would say it is their father and mother before anyone else. But I have not been fortunate enough to even remember the face of my father, not even a blur memory. My mother says he got into habit of drinking and eventually became alcoholic. This drinking habit resulted in huge conflict and fights between them. They separated when I just still an infant, much before I could even register his face in my memory. My father then disappeared without trace. Not even his own family members know his whereabouts still today.

Following the separation, my mother left the house of in-laws and returned to her parental house where I was raised along with my three siblings. My mother then decided to head to Kathmandu, the country's capital, in search of opportunity to earn money. She left the four of us in the care of her step mother, who did not like my mother and prioritized her own children over our upbringings. We were not given much care in my mother's parental home. It was difficult to even get proper meals and we suffered from malnutrition as a result.

After heading to Kathmandu, my mother started working as a housemaid. Back in those days, telephones had not reached our village but my mother heard about our plights from some relatives. Deeply upset, she sent my eldest sister to an acquaintance in Bhakapur, nearby the capital city, where she lived and learned the craft of tailoring. My oldest brother was given to the care of an uncle, from whom he learnt the craft of carpentry. However, both of them were deprived of the opportunity for education.

Only I and another sister were left in the village with care of my step-grandmother. After I got severely ill, with my body filled with puss, my mother requested one of her relatives to bring me to her in Kathmandu. I was then treated and lived in her master's home where she continued working as a housemaid. She also spent her monthly salary to send me to a local school. Major portion of her salary would go to paying for my education. After spending on my education, she would have barely any saving from her monthly salary.

If I had continued staying in the village, I would have been deprived of education. I joined school only after arriving in Kathmandu. As I joined school late, I was the oldest student in my class. However, I was considered good in studies and for this reason, the local school allowed me to skip the classes of upper kindergarten, grade three and grade five and make jumpstart. This allowed me to catch up with the children of my age group.

My other sister, who was the last one in village, was brought to Kathmandu after my mother's acquaintance arranged for her a job as a housemaid at someone's home. The employer agreed to send her to school but gave her lots of household works, which hampered her studies.

After a year, one of the acquaintances of my mother found a charity organization that supported studies of my sister. At that time, my mother was struggling to pay for my education as school fees increase every year but her salary remained unchanged. That is when my mother learnt about Manjughoksha Academy from a neighbor who knows about our family's plight. The kind neighbor connected us with Miss Dolma Yangkyi

of the school, who found me a sponsor from Manjushree Verein to support my studies.

I started studying in Manjughoksha Academy from grade seven while living in the school's hostel. Evelyn Gimelli, the kind lady of the Verein, has been supporting my studies since then, even years after I passed my studies from the school. She has been kind enough to support my high school and undergraduate studies as well. I would not have been able to continue my studies this far had it not been for her help.

Out of the four children, the eldest two remained deprived of studies. I and my sister, who are the youngest two, consider ourselves very fortunate to be able to study. The organization which sponsored my sister was disbanded due to some issues but my mother was able to pay for her studies as my sponsor Evelyn from Manjushree Verein continued supporting my studies.

Due to my passion in writing, I joined Republica daily as an intern journalist three years ago. Impressed with my work and learning attitude, the company hired me as their staff reporter after my internship came to an end. This job provides me pocket money and also enables me to contribute to my family expenses.

I am currently in the final year of my undergraduate studies. After a year, I will have college degree, the first member of my family to earn it. I am making progress in my career and academics with a strong learning zeal. Everyone has huge expectations from me and I will not let them down.

Dear Manjushree Verein and sponsors, I am only one of the hundreds of lives that have been changed by your kindness. I grew up with many friends of poor financial background like me back in Manjughoksha Academy. Like me, many of them were able to receive quality education only because of love and support from sponsors like you. It has been life changing opportunity for us, something which we do not take for granted.

Your deeds have taught us many important life lessons. From the way our sponsors selflessly support us, we have learnt to share our unconditional love and kindness to other people. You have planted seeds of love and kindness within us that only keeps growing. This has developed strong urge within us to rise beyond ourselves and help others in need. Indeed, love and kindness are contagious and it spreads when shared. You have created the cycle of love and kindness which will keep going forever.

During the last visit of Manjushree's President Ursula Meichle in Nepal, she shared me a story of my sponsor Mrs Evelyn. I was told that during Evelyn's birthday,

Evelyn asked her friends and acquaintances that she does not need any birthday gift. Instead, she urged them to make donation for my studies, which would support my further studies – the graduate degree. She said the fund for my graduate studies would be her final gift to me. Her kindness made me speechless and very emotional.

In that moment, I decided to follow Evelyn's footsteps and share the kindness I have received. After I complete my undergraduate studies, I would like to sponsor an underprivileged child whose family cannot afford to pay for education. As I would not be here without love and support of my sponsor, it would be fair only if I repay the deed by helping someone else.

Dear Evelyn, you really inspire me to become a good person. No amount of thank you would do be sufficient for your kind act. I hope I can make you proud. I imagine how difficult it must be for you to manage education funds for me. But you can rest now; I will soon take over what you started. I will sponsor a child selflessly in the same way you sponsored me. I hope I can make a difference in someone's life the same way that you have made in mine.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone from Manjushree Verein on the behalf of all of the sponsor children. Truly, we seek to return the kindness in any way we can. Thank you for being our role model, teaching us the valuable lessons as well as giving us the unconditional love and support. We feel truly blessed.

With love and regards,
Ram Saran Tamang.