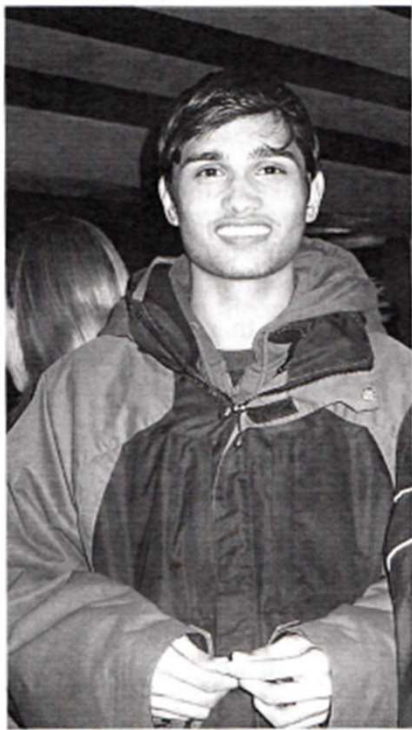


THE HUMAGAIS

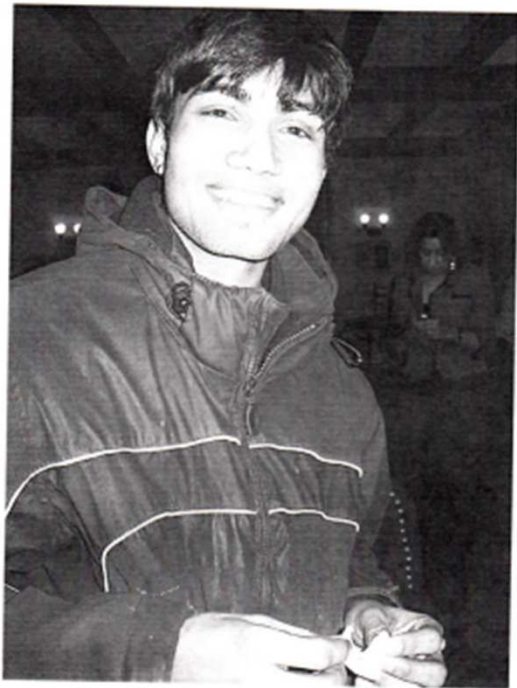




Krishna

Prakash and Shailesh

Januka



K R I S H N A

In December, I interview Krishna with the help of his younger son Shailesh. Krishna has not yet learned English but always finds ways (gestures, nodding) to communicate successfully even without the language, and is eager to share his story. His wife serves us milky tea as my coworker Heather, Shailesh, and I settle onto the family's couches—Krishna sits on the floor, his ankles and bare feet sticking out of cotton pants. The apartment is cold because the windows aren't sealed and the cost of electric heat is so high.

Heather, another VISTA at the MCC office, has worked with the Humgais in employment, and I've gotten to know them through computer classes. Everyone in our office knows the family

Like the majority of the Bhutanese refugees coming to the US, Krishna grew up in southern Bhutan. They were farmers and grew "rice, wheat, and all the crops," Shailesh translates. "Also I had a cow, many cows. The cows slept at home. Cows, buffalo, sheep, goat, and chicken...peacocks."

"Peacocks?" I ask.

"Not peacocks," Shailesh laughs. He and his father have been in the US for about half a year, and Shailesh's English is improving quickly. "I don't know...there is one type of bird... white. White and black, yes. No, no we cannot eat peacocks.

"All the family went out to the field to work. In Bhutan if a child is about five years old they start work in the field. My parents told us to do that work, to harvest grass for the cows. Sometimes they told me to take the cow to the forest. When I was in Bhutan I saw that all people do the same work, so I did not feel difficulty."

Krishna's mother was his father's first wife. After having two sons with Krishna's mother, his father married again. At this point, "My father separated from me and my mom. We sit [lived] near the jungle, with nobody near our house. They quarreled with each other. My mother could not live with my father because when I was small my father beat her too much. She left and married another. I only saw her once after that, thirty-six years later." Krishna was only five or six when his mother left and he went to live with his grandparents.

Then Krishna's father remarried. "My stepmother and my father, they were very happy. They had six daughters and one son." Krishna and his brother joined the family, "but they were not as good to me and my brother as to their children. They always made us do more work."

At eighteen, while still living with his father, Krishna met his wife. "I myself married with Nar Maya, my father cannot do anything." Krishna's father was upset, but his wife's parents were happy with the marriage.

"When I was twenty-one I am grown up. I was going to the field to do my work when my stepbrother and stepsister told something bad about me to my father and stepmother. After I returned from the work they beat me, said I am bad. I left home. They were telling lies. It's not the culture [to beat], but they did."

This was not new; Krishna suffered abuse at the hands of his father and stepmother throughout his childhood. Through Shailesh he tells me that once, when he was sick, "my parents said 'no, you have to go for hard work.' When I said I am sick, they brought some salt—salt, you know? They brought some salt and they sprayed it to the eyes, two times." Because of the times he was abused, "still I have pain and I am not able to sit like this [gestures to the way that Heather, Shailesh and I sit cross-legged],



so I sit like this [he is crouched on the floor].”

Krishna's younger brother stayed behind when Krishna left home. “My parents were also bad to him. When I was in the refugee camp for seventeen years we were not able to talk on the phone, but when I came to the United States, I phoned him. He is still in Bhutan but he is separate from our parents.”

Through Shailesh, Krishna tells us that when he left, “I did not say anything to my parents, I just left. After leaving I did not eat anything for three days. I just drank water. This was in a mountainous area.” After three days he found a house. “I had no money. I asked them [for] drinking water and I drank the water. Then I wanted to travel with by bus but I had no money. I walked and walked and it was very dark. After maybe forty kilometers I saw a house. It is dark and I stayed in that house for the night, but the people in that house say not to sit here because my father will come to the house and act badly to us—you should go from here.

“After that there is an Indian house where I sit one month and fifteen days. The owner of the house is a business man and I told him all about me. I had to work in his shop selling goods to the customer like rice, fruit, and biscuit...apple, oranges... mango....” Shailesh smiles apologetically and tells me, “I don't know, there is lot of items I don't know the name of.” Krishna speaks quickly in Nepali and stands up, disappearing from the room and then returning with a picture dictionary. We flip through to the page of fruits. Shailesh and Krishna find pictures of a peach, pineapple, papaya, and sugarcane.

“After one month in the Indian people's house, [the Indian man] took me to my mother's brother's son. I sit there another nine, ten years. They have a large family and are also very rich. He did business work, like a Cub Food business. The cousin had

JANUKA

I interview Januka after talking with both her brothers and her father. I often forget that we are about the same age, since we have lived such different lives, but we are both in our early twenties when she comes to the MCC office and we sit next to each other at a large, empty table. She seems nervous as I start the audio recorder.

“Do you remember Bhutan?” I ask.

“Bhutan...it is just like a dream. I am so small. I just remember how they treat us sometimes, I just remember a little bit.” She knows that her father bought a plot of land, where the family farmed rice. This was when her first brother, Prakash, was born. “I was happy to be a big sister. Then we moved to another place, and my brother Shailesh was born there. I was five years old, and I helped my parents, cooking food and helping with the cows, oxen, and goats.” She also helped take care of her younger siblings. “I fed them and watched them, and cleaned the house. My mom and my dad were busy in the field most of the day. They left early in the morning, came back to take lunch, and went out again. Sometimes when there was a moon they would work in the moonlight.” Nearby families would all help each other when it was time to harvest.

“I did not go to school, there was no chance. At the time, the Drukpa people did not allow the Lhotshampa people to join the school.” Januka also remembers the Drukpas coming with trucks and stealing the family's rice paddy harvest, and how “they took more land and kept for us only a little. And one day, when I was five or six years old, the army came to our home and searched for my father. He was working on the land, but they found him and handcuffed him. They said they will take him to

three [children], one son and two daughters. But they are now in Nepal. Now he buy the house and land and sells to another.”

Krishna took care of his cousin’s children. “[The cousin’s son] was three years old, his sister was six months, and I grow of them. Now they also love me. I worked in the market there and the gas station.”

I ask if Nar Maya, his wife, knew where Krishna had gone when he left his father’s home.

“When I leave the home she did not know where I am. When I left the house, my parent’s house, my wife was pregnant.” At first Nar Maya did not live with Krishna’s father, but after their daughter was born he came for her. “He [Krishna’s father] took Nar Maya to his house to do the work. He treated her badly. They were so bad to her and also my brother. But after three years I came to her and said I will work and make money and I will come back, and I will take you.”

Krishna worked in his cousin’s field, and when his daughter was three he came for his wife and child. “When they were in my parents’ house their clothes are not good, they were not provided for. I take them to my cousin’s brother’s house and they provided clothes to them.” Prakash, Krishna’s second child, was born during this time, and then, “I worked and when I owned some money I bought land for us. After that Shailesh is born. I buy myself land and I work for myself.”

Four years later, “there was a big rally in Bhutan. In Bhutan there are no human rights [for the Lhotshampa people]. They asked for the human’s rights. The government sent military to all the houses. They came in the night time and the day time and they beat the people. They killed like that.

“After the rally I lived there for two years. In daytime we worked in the field, at the night time the military came and cap-

jail, and they took him away, but on the way they suddenly left him. We don't know what happened, we don't know why. They army came often to take people, and they killed some of them. Others they put in jail. They would burn houses and steal the harvest, like ours."

Januka says that after her father was arrested, he hid with some relatives. When the army continued looking for him, "he hid in the jungle with some relatives. We brought them food. They spent many days like that, before we left. Then, in the early morning, we left. I was small, but I helped carry things. We walked into the jungle, even though it was dangerous--there were many elephants."

The family crossed into the Bengal state. "The people there were so kind. They gave us rooms to sleep. I don't remember how many days we stayed. Then the Indian government came with trucks and took us to Nepal. It was so troubling. The police of Nepal questioned us, and then they took put us on another truck. We came to the bank of a river, and we prayed--in the Hindu religion we believe that the river has a god, and we prayed.

"Then we stayed five or six months in Mai, a temporary camp, but it was very dangerous and the conditions were bad. There was sickness. The wind never stopped, and it brought sandstorms. It kept us from making fires. We tried to cook in our tents, but they were plastic, and the storms would blow them down. We ate beaten rice.

"After five or six months we moved to Goldhap Camp. It was not good, but it was better than Mai. At least we had the chance to go to school. We lived in a bamboo hut with a thatched roof, and it had just one room for all six of us. It was so congested, and every year we had to repair the hut. After ten years we made it wider illegally--the agency didn't allow it, but we

tured Lhotshampas, took them and beat them. So at night we went to the forest to sleep. There is too much rain in Bhutan and we sit in the [forest] in the raining time also. It was very difficult.

“One time they captured me. When they came to the house I say that I have not done anything and they leave, but another group came. They do not ask questions. Many other people they shoot and they killed. I was not. They left me in the middle of the way.

“Sometimes when the Bhutan military, army, attack, they cut off one leg. Sometimes they cut off the hand and they throw it to the truck. Many people are dying in Bhutan. So difficult. Sometimes the military take the husband and wife and they tie them. They take the wife to this side, the husband to that side, and they do whatever they can to the wife in front of the husband. The parents and the children, they see from the house.

“We moved at night. Januka was six, Prakash was four, Shailesh was two, and Renuka was one and a half years old. We did not take anything from our house when we moved because I carried Prakash and held hands with Januka. Nar Maya carried Shailesh and Renuka. We walked and walked. There were two big forests and in the forest there is tiger, lion, elephant. The elephant are so bad in Bhutan, they kill the people.”

One night while walking, Krishna heard the sounds of elephants. Suddenly the family found themselves in the middle of a herd. “They are all around us. We keep quiet and sit in the middle.”

After the elephant herd moved past them, the family continued walking to India. “I had some money but there were men with guns. They asked for the money and I gave it to them.”

After walking for hours and hours, they arrived in India. “We left at three of night from Bhutan and when we come to In-

could not manage. We made three bedrooms and one kitchen."

While in the camp, Januka was able to start school. She enjoyed it, but found some classes difficult, and it was hard to find a quiet place to study in the crowded camp. She repeated three of the classes, graduated, and started taking some of the vocational courses offered by the Caritas Nepal NGO. "I was trained in hair styling, and photography, and after that I completed the beads and garlands training on making necklaces. I didn't finish the hair styling course because after one month we were ready to come to the United States."

By that time the family had been in the camp for seventeen years. During their sixteenth year, on March 1, there was a fire. "In one house a cylinder of gas exploded. We were home, finishing dinner, and we heard a noise outside. We went to look and saw the fire. At the same time a big storm came, so it was difficult to put out the flames. The whole camp burned down. We crossed the river and ran into the forest. We stayed there for four months in tents. It was so difficult. The local people from the village came and stole things, and there was a big rainstorm. We lost everything. All our property for seventeen years was gone.

"Fifteen days before we left they started distributing bamboo and plastic for people to begin rebuilding." Januka's family didn't rebuild because they knew they were coming to the US; they had sent her brother Prakash ahead, and were excited to follow. Januka says "we were not worried about him because our cousin was here. And before we followed him, I thought the US has only big, big houses. I thought it was like downtown Minneapolis. Not just me, all the people thought that."

Januka wanted to join English classes as soon as she came, but instead she had to start working a rotating schedule that didn't allow for regular courses. She works in housekeeping at a hotel,

dia it is three o'clock of daytime. No sleep. In the forest it is difficult, when you sleep there are bears that come and there are poisonous plants.

In India they joined other Bhutanese families and local villagers provided the group with some food. "We sit there for five days. [Then] the Indian army came and put us in the truck. They took us and they threw us to the Bengali state. They threw us at night, at 11:00 pm, and we didn't know any language, we didn't have any money, they had stolen it, and it is winter season. February. How can the children sleep like this in the road? And when morning time came at 5:00 am, again the Bengali police came. They took us to the Nepal border and at 9:00 pm they threw us to Nepal.

"There is a long bridge [between] India and Nepal. After we crossed, the Nepal police captured us and asked where you are coming from? Why are you coming? They all ask that. We have not eaten anything and we all are crying because of our hunger. The Nepal police made a statement and took us to another truck. It is midnight."

The Nepali police brought them to a temporary camp called Mai. "There was one small house [for everyone] and there was nobody to cook the food. There was not any food to cook. We had no pots to cook. We sit like this that night. It was very cold and the wind blew all night. We sat very quietly there and we cut the night like that.

"There were no tents. They are not prepared. Before we came there [were already] some Bhutanese from Bhutan. In the morning they asked, you have already eat the food? and we said no, we have not. They provided some of the food, like rice. At the time when they gave the rice we had no matches to go in the fire, and no pot. They gave us the pot to cook and we cooked the

but “it’s not good work. Sometimes they only need me two days a week, and they give us fifteen rooms to clean on the weekend shifts, eighteen on the weekday shifts. I don’t have time for a lunch break. My manager would get angry, so I don’t take lunch and I finish my work. Sometimes my mom says I must take a lunch; she forcefully puts food into my bag.”

She tells of other difficulties, too: not knowing the bus route to visit her uncle, not speaking English fluently, and the economy—if not for the recession, Januka and her brothers might find other jobs, but as it is, they have decided to stay where they are for the moment. But in spite of these troubles, Januka has enjoyed “visiting different places, like the museums and the Hindu temple, and watching movies. I liked celebrating Thanksgiving, and Christmas.” Even though her family is Hindu, they’ve decided to try out American holidays. And they’ve started watching television: the WWF smack down, “every Friday,” and *Superstars of Dance*. They like court shows, and “crime shows, police chases. We learn from there what we have to do or not do, how the police know things—in their police car there is a computer, and everywhere they keep cameras.”

Meanwhile, Januka has noticed “a vast difference” in gender roles here in the US. “In our culture, in our country, there is no chance for women to do higher jobs. Women drive buses here, but in Nepal only men drive the bus. In the towns, maybe a couple of women drive a car or motorcycle. Here there are women everywhere, in the offices, in the hospital, everywhere. In Bhutan women usually work on the land and in the home, they cook food and take care of the children. They don’t get a chance to do other work.

“Do you know the cck and hen? In Nepal they tell women it is not good for the hen to make noise. Here in the US

food, returned that pot.

“After some days, the Red Cross provided food and some tents. We lived in small tent. It was very difficult to live. The wind blew and the fire would go out. We spent six months in the Mai camp. Many people there died. Too much cholera.

“Januka and Prakash were sick. On one day thirty-five, forty-five people might die. In front of our house there were twenty-two people in one family—after there were only seven people. I don’t know whether the seven people died or not, we moved before them. We went to the Goldhap Camp.

“When we moved the UNHCR provided us with some food. They saw that we are refugees and countries like the United States, Canada—they helped the refugees. They gave a little food for the family and I worked outside the camp. I worked in things like house construction, road construction, and business. Also [as a] school security guard, and with Save the Children as a volunteer. I added to my house the solar plate and I put light to my house.”

After fifteen years in Goldhap, Krishna was injured doing construction work. “50 kg iron fell on my foot.” Another time, “wood fell from the second floor. It is come and hit me in the back and also to the leg. My back was broken. They referred me to a doctor outside the refugee camp. I was at home for eight months. All the blood...sometimes if I had pain I saw the doctor.”

After this, Krishna could not return to work, so “when the fire happened I was in the house. I would walk but when I walked a long distance, I was pained. When I stood I also was pained, and when I sit like that, I was pained. I had many medicines, but they were not sufficient.”

The fire in the camp happened just before the family came

there is more freedom. Women can become anything, a doctor, a nurse, anything. In Nepal some girls wear pants, and when I was small I did too, but when I grew up my parents told me they didn't like to see girls in pants. They told me to wear a dress or skirt. Now that we're here in Minneapolis they see everyone wearing pants, so now they don't mind."

In the coming years, Januka plans to continue living with her family. "I don't think about marriage because my parents don't have jobs. We are working to support our family. I am close to my parents and brothers and sister. But if my parents get jobs and somebody asks for my hand and I like to marry, then maybe I will marry. It is difficult to marry here, I think. I would like to marry in my community, because our culture would be the same."

One worry that Januka shares with her parents is about practicing their death rites in the US. "According to our culture, when somebody dies we burn the body. We stay without clothes, sleep on the floor, and fast—we take food only once a day—for thirteen days. We make a fire, and a special person reads a holy book. When my father's mother died, we did not have to do all of this because she left her first husband and went to another, but otherwise we have to do it everyday for thirteen days. That is difficult here, we don't get the time off from our jobs.

"One of our relatives came to Texas and died after twenty days from a heart attack. In our culture the son gives fire to the body of his parent, but here he flipped a switch—we heard it was a remote thing. My parents are afraid. They don't know how this works here. And we heard that they had to pay five thousand dollars for the cremation. Is that true?"

I know cremation is expensive, but I don't know what it costs, and I tell her that it can vary. I say I'll look into and get back to her, and that I know the local Bhutanese community is try-

to the United States. Krishna's possessions and money "all were gone from the fire. When I came from Bhutan to Minnesota I did not bring anything because all was gone by the fire. After the fire we lived in the forest for a full month. The different organizations, they helped us, and after four months we came to the United States.

"I thought very badly in that time because I missed my neighbors and relatives, but here it is good. I like the United States. The process for us to come took six months. When we came we are MCC clients. All the things they provide, they are from the MCC. I give thanks to the MCC and also the people of the United States.

"We came with only one bag each with some clothes. MCC helped by making appointments to the hospital and they gave materials too. In all things they are helping us, each and every things. After the fire happened in the camp we were in the forest for a month, so when we came to the United States I was very happy to sit in a house.

Now Krishna and his family are living in North Minneapolis, but "after winter we will change to another house. It is so expensive and sometimes Januka and Prakash have only three or four days of work a week. This week they have done only three days. It is difficult to pay the rent, water and electricity, gas, and travel loans."

Krishna has started taking English classes. "In Bhutan and in Goldhap Camp in Nepal I am not thinking I will go to the United States or any other country. Before we come, we thought that our lives can be done in the refugee camp."

In the future, "I will become a citizen of the United States, and grow old in the United States, and die in the United States. If I am well I will work. When I was in Nepal I used to

ing to meet with funeral homes to discuss their death rites.

“It is difficult to exist in the United States,” Januka says. “I don’t know how marriage works here, either. In Bhutan, according to our parents, in ancient times a boy and a girl would not see each other before marrying, especially if one of them is rich. The parents just talk and decide for them, and they married their daughters forcefully. And they say that sometimes after marrying, after getting one child, some of them would not talk.

“But now it is normal to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, and maybe the boy will talk to his parents, who will go to ask for the hand of the girl. It’s more up to the boy and girl now, they are not forced. In Nepal rich people marry at home and the poor go to the temple. I heard that if someone marries in the US, we have to report it to the police?”

I tell her that there is a legal document to sign, but people usually have separate ceremonies that can be at a church or temple or anywhere they like.

“Then do we have to pay the church or not?” She asks.

I tell her I’m not sure about renting churches, but that marriage licenses do cost money; I don’t know how much. I tell her I’ll look it up, and later, I do: a license fee in Minnesota is \$100.

“Life is expensive here,” Januka says. “It is good, yeah, many things are good, but some of the things...it is difficult for us. After a while, I hope, we will adapt.”

work, but because I am not well it is difficult. I hope that I will buy a house and a car, be a citizen, and sit in the United States.”

I ask Krishna if he worries about himself or his children losing touch with their Bhutanese culture. “I do not feel bad,” he responds through Shailesh. “I want to learn the American culture. My mentor, he took me to see the Christmas lights. I am happy. I feel okay. All the people who live in the world, American or Nepali, we all are equal, the same.”







Prakash and Shailesh sit down with my coworker Heather and me at our office on a late December afternoon. We have known them for a while at this point—Heather worked with them during their search for employment, I worked with them in the computer lab, and their family even invited our staff to a *dussehra* celebration during the fall. Everyone at the office seems to have been involved with their family at some point during their resettlement to Minnesota; the Bhutanese are a new community to our state, so there is little in the way of an existing community to support those arriving.

The older of the brothers, Prakash, begins. “We lived in the southern part of Bhutan, the district of Sarpang. My parents were farmers. Just our family lived together. We live in Nepali community.” The Lhotshampa people of southern Bhutan have Nepali heritage and speak the Nepali language.

Prakash does not remember much of Bhutan, saying “it was a dream for me.” He left when he was only four or five. Shailesh says, “I also think the same. It is like a dream.”

Prakash does remember leaving the country: “It was midnight. My mom and dad, they wake me up from the bed. ‘Let’s move, let’s move,’ they said, and before we wake up they already taken some stuff [to the forest]. They take us towards the forest and we come to the India by walking. They said we have to go to another country. We should not have to leave, we were very small. We don’t know why we have to move, and I don’t ask anything.

“I follow my parents. I remember not that much, but we cross the forest and after that we reach to India, where we live for one day, and after that there was some army from India.”

“Bengal,” Shailesh clarifies quietly.

“They take us to Bengal State,” Prakash continues. “And the Bengal army, they take all of us to Nepal. My family and other families. They put all of the people in the truck and they take us to the border of Nepal and India and they thrown there.” He snorts. “We had no house and we live there for two days—five days. At night we live in the street.”

I ask Shailesh if he remembers this, too. “Only a little.” His cell phone starts ringing, a mellow whistling tone, but he ignores it and keeps talking. “After that the Nepalese police, they come and talk about ‘who are you?’ They take our family and other families to the Mai Camp and we sit there three or four months, I think. After that we sit in a refugee camp, the Goldhap Camp.”

Prakash adds, “The Nepal police used to come [to Mai Camp] and say, ‘it’s not allowed to make a house here; you move’—and they thrown all our tent and we had to make them again. Again they say, ‘this is not the area, this is the forest area, it’s not allowed to make a tent here.’ Again, again they thrown from there. And later on, the UNHCR know that there are refugees from Bhutan going back to Nepal and they manage for resettlement. We live in Mai Camp and they provide some rice for the food, but not for sufficient, just a little. That was on the bank of the river. There was no work, no work.”

They lived in “tents, because it was so new,” Prakash explains. “We lived closer to each other.” The brothers, their two sisters, and their parents shared one tent. “After that there is some...epi—what is that, there is one kind of disease—that come in the refugee camp—and many people used to die.” I guess a couple of diseases, and the brothers agree that it was cholera. “Cholera, yeah,” Shailesh says, and Prakash elaborates, “Due to

the pollution and all. There is a lot of pollution. Me and my mom became sick there, when we sit there.”

“But you survived,” I say, and Prakash responds, “Yeah. That is good work.” Everyone laughs. When I ask Shailesh if he remembers Mai, too, he says, “Yeah, there is the large differences. Whoever die there, they used to bury the people there.”

“At night when we sleep, the bed used to shake,” Prakash adds. “We wake up at the night and we used to ask our dad, ‘what happen this?’ and he said, ‘nothing, nothing, it is only the’—like—you know—”

“Earthquake?”

“Yeah, like an earthquake. It is like an earthquake but it is not a earthquake.”

“Was it when they were—burying people—?” Heather asks.

“Yeah. Yeah.”

“It was from—like—a machine?”

Yes, the brothers agree. Prakash continues, “Then we move to different camp. We lived in Goldhap. First they give us tent same as Mai, only the tent that we put the plastic over. But later on we make a wall of bamboo. And it was quite good. In Goldhap there is the different organizations to support us like UNHCR, LWF, Caritas. Caritas, they manage for education. There is the school up to class ten in refugee camp. And UNHCR provide for tents, house, bamboos.”

“They give the materials, to construct the house,” Shailesh elaborates.

“They give the rice, refined oil, and kerosene for lamp,” Prakash continues. “There is no electricity there, so we have to make lamp with kerosene. And they provide some vegetables.” Shailesh’s phone starts ringing again, and Prakash talks over it.

“Cabbage, chili and all. Not much. And later on there is a school.” Shailesh’s phone beeps with a voicemail.

“When we come from Mai to the Goldhap camp there is not any school,” Prakash goes on. “They teach at the forest site. I was so small at that time. After one year they construct the school. Blooming Lotus English School. They teach one subject as Nepali, and one subject that is Dzongkha. It is Bhutan language. Others are in English.” Together the brothers list the other subjects: mathematics, social studies, history, geography, economics, accounting. They both liked school, and miss their friends. “I think student life is the better one,” Prakash says. “I have got many friends in the school. And when I came here I miss them a lot. Some friends are already in US now but in different state.”

“Also in different country,” Shailesh adds.

Heather and I ask what they did during their free time in the camp. “We used to play lots of sport,” Prakash remembers, “and he [Shailesh] is the intelligent in football [soccer]. And we used to play table tennis, volleyball, cricket, basketball. They manage for running competition. They provide the prize, they give us sometimes...seal. You know seal?”

“No...seal is an animal...?” I ask uncertainly.

“Like a trophy?” Heather suggests.

“What do they call it?” Prakash responds.

“A medallion?” Heather asks.

“A medal?” I ask.

“A medal,” Shailesh agrees.

“A medal!” Prakash nods, “Yeah, yeah, they provide metal. And some they provide with soap and very funny picture.” He laughs. “And sometimes there is the competition from camp to camp...and our Goldhap is the most senior one.”

In addition to sports, their little sister Renuka made them play house. “Still here she is playing,” Prakash laughs. “We have got the little baby [their three-year old cousin], with her she still plays.”

The school in Goldhap is free through level ten, and then costs money, but Caritas provided help. “After we complete the eleven and twelve, all the money we have to pay by ourself,” Prakash says. “Inside the camp there is no job. For job we have to go out of the camp and search.” Some farmed, while others worked in construction.

“First I study, I study continuously,” says Shailesh, “[but] when the school is closed, I go for work. Road construction, house construction. There is a small shop, and I sit in the shop selling the goods and sometimes I brought some food from the village area and sold in the camp itself. [Our] father have a shop and he used to sit in the shop...”

“—I used to import goods from India to Nepal,” Prakash breaks in, “to [be] sold in the shop.”

Just before the family left Goldhap, there was a fire in the camp. “It started from one house,” Prakash says. “Later on we came to know that it was the fire from the gas. Cylinder gas.

“At that time we are at home, talking with family and neighbor. And there is some quarrel we heard. We move towards the quarrel site and we see, there is a fire! And we start to fight with the fire. It comes greater and greater. We throw water and green leaves, but we don’t [have] success. They call the fire-fighting, and firefighting came there after half an hour. They don’t success to fight with the fire. Later on it comes to our house and I take the materials, some foods, rice and our clothes. The whole camp is damaged.”

Shailesh wasn’t at home when the fire started. “I and my

friend, we are going to the market. I saw from there and it is come bright and we ran from that shop to the fire guard. We two are go for the fire fighting. It's become very, very more fire. I thinks now I will go to my house to take out materials, but the fire block me and I am not success.

“Within two and half hours it finish. All 1328 huts had burn. I don't know where they [my family] are gone and I feel very sad and I am separated from them. After fire I search—search my family but it is very dark, maybe it is 1:30 at night and I search and I—I do not find them. My family thought that ‘he is already burn, he is not here.’

“When I search I found one of the friend and I asked him ‘Can you know my family? Where is my family?’ and he said that ‘maybe they are in the forest.’ I am searching all the family and after that I think is maybe four am, morning. And after that I see that there is not any materials at all in our house.”

“He comes at the morning,” Prakash says.

There were crowds of people trying to find their family members. Finally, someone brought a microphone and they started announcing the names of those separated from their families, and Shailesh was reunited with his.

After all this, “We live in the forest for two days,” Prakash says. “After that we live in the school. My father used to work in the school as security guard, he occupied one room so we go there. We are not sleeping in a bed, we sleep on a floor. Only after four month did I sleep in a bed, when I come to the United States. Some people lives inside the school and people who are not, they live in the forest. They don't have any tent [at first] but after fifteen days the UNICEF provided some tents to people.”

After two months, Prakash went ahead of the family to Minnesota. Shailesh tells me that “We already, before the fire,

have started a process of resettlement to the US.” Prakash says he wasn’t scared, but “I missed all of my family and the friends,” and the family “worried about how is the US. How they treat us. They may discourage us or they may do something for us.”

“Yeah,” Shailesh agrees. “When I come here it is vast different from I thinks.”

“We see the movies and pictures,” Prakash tells me. The refugees from Goldhap would visit a nearby city with a movie theater. “And news, they said about the US and George W Bush. He did this something in the US, he change something. Yeah. And at that time we imagine that the US has a lot of big, big building, very tall. And when I arrive here I found only the downtown is like that—all the homes are made up of wood and—it is different, but [some the] same as I thought.

“When I arrive here I live in St. Paul. There was two guys from Nepal and I live with them for one month. [Then] I came to the church house, Mayflower Church house before my family arrive. I manage some materials and some food for them.”

Shailesh says the family did worry about Prakash before they joined the eldest son, but they were able to talk on the phone. “He told good things about the US. He said ‘come, come fast. It’s good.’ We moved to the Mayflower House. I saw the difference things between Nepal and the US. In Nepal there are construct cement house. But here there is wooden. When I was in Nepal I thought that in US there is also the cement house. But when I come here and do like this [rapping motion with his fist], it is wooden.”

When the family arrived, Saw Josiah (their caseworker from MCC) and their anchor relative met them at the airport. Prakash says that MCC was “very helpful. I find the people, the employee and all the MCC members very friendly and cooperative

one and helpful one, so I want to give a lot of thanks to the MCC.” The brothers’ parents went on a government assistance program, as did Prakash; Januka and Shailesh were enrolled in an employment program; and Renuka started attending high school. Because their parents couldn’t work, there was a lot of pressure for the boys and Januka to start jobs as soon as possible. Sonja, their job counselor, helped them apply for positions.

Prakash got a job at a hotel, and during the Republican National Convention, Januka and Shailesh were hired as well. Shailesh only worked for twelve days, “in laundry. They don’t say before ‘we hire you for temporary.’ But one lady, I don’t know her name, she said that ‘from today, you have to leave your job and search for another job and go.’ And I said ‘Why, I am not make any mistake,’ and she said ‘You are not do any mistake, but you have to leave now.’”

“She said one thing in interview—” Prakash starts.

“—and doing another,” Shailesh finishes. They are clearly frustrated.

“And at the times of the interviews she said you are provided with free lunch and all, but later on there was no free lunch.” Prakash leans back. “I take the lunch break, but my sister Januka, she doesn’t take because she works a little slow.

“It is difficult. The supervisor—I don’t think he is as good as I think. When I was given the training, they said that we have to work only for housekeeping, but later when I finish they send me to do another job. Like sweeping of floor.

“And I think the supervisor make us to do more work [than the others]. He don’t say others employed to do this thing, this thing, [and] this thing. But he says me and Januka do this thing. So we don’t finish in time. And they complain that [we are] late.” Sonja, their job counselor, spoke with the supervisor,

but Prakash and Januka still work under difficult conditions.

“Still I am working there but I am trying to find another job. Due to the chemical we use there—” he shows us his hands, the skin cracked and red. “I use lotion every day. I don’t know what happens, it was bleeding...It was not only the hand, it was all over the body.” They wear gloves, but Prakash says it doesn’t help. “It is not good, so I am trying for another job.”

The brothers say it has also been difficult explaining where they are from. “Some people they say, ‘are you Indian?’” Shailesh says. “And I answer that ‘I am Bhutanese.’ But my nationality is Nepali.”

“They don’t know when I say Nepal, Bhutan,” Prakash tells us. “And I say, ‘Do you know Mount Everest?’”

In the camp, they were able to celebrate religious holidays. “We miss our festival,” Prakash says. This year, they’re going to try out Christmas; a new American friend has brought them a small plastic tree, ornaments, and stockings to hang. Their father’s mentor has given them a Christmas wreath, and they made holiday cookies.

While still living in the Mayflower House, Prakash tells me about a time he was outside the house phoning Nepal. “I am walking, not three minute away from home. And I heard the ‘hi,’ they said ‘hi,” and I turn and said ‘hi” and they have their gun. They said ‘give me your cell phone’ and I look at their gun, [to see] whether it is a toy or a real one. I sense that gun was real and I thought if I don’t give the cell phone to them they may shoot me. They grab the cell phone from my hand and take out wallet from my pocket. They said ‘Go on. Move, move. Move!’

“I turn towards my home and I walk a little bit. I [look] back to them to see what direction they are going. Then I run towards my home and I phone the police and I block phone, EBT

card, and the bank—the bank where I have open the checking account. I block all of the things and cell phone company. After that I call the police and the police arrive there and they are searching. But they never found.

“I thought there is no fight in the US. But also I have a fight with two guys. I come by train [home from work]. When I was in train, I sit on the seat and they spits toward me.”

“From the mouth,” Shailesh clarifies.

“Yeah, from the mouth. No [reason], I simply sit there. They spit toward my cheek and ear. And I turn over there and I said, ‘What do you want, man?’ I ask only that much. They said something, I don’t know what they are saying, I don’t understand. And I sit quietly and when Nicollet Mall come I exit there. And they also exit there. And come backside [follow] and they do like this, like this—” Prakash mimes someone pushing at his shoulder from behind. “—and they say something I don’t understand. I feel very very angry and I turn and I catch their clothes.” He gestures to the front of a shirt. “I gave one punch to them. They spit towards me and again they come to fight. Two of them—I think they are the age of me.

“I give one punch to them, the other comes to kick me, and then I fight with the two of them but they have put pant here—” he gestures on his legs to indicate sagged pants, “—and I think that is why they have the difficulty to kick. One boy has bleeding from the nose and he ran away and the other comes to fight. I kick him and more people gather there. They said, ‘Run, run, they may call their friend,’ and I run towards the bus. I have to take 22 number bus but I take the 14 number just to [get away].

“I have the long hair and I thought from my hair they may recognize me. I cut the hair. They hurt me but not as [badly as I hurt them].”

I ask how he learned to fight. “In Nepal we used to fight. Nepal is very different from here, and there...there is no sufficient strong rules. They have it in the law, but people don’t follow. We had fights, too many, so we are experienced in fighting.”

“There is fighting [between the people] outside the camp and camp people,” Shailesh explains.

“They came with the gang,” Prakash says. “We have a lot of fight with the—not only the hand—”

“With the gun,” Shailesh helps.

“—with the gun, but I won’t, I haven’t played with the gun,” Prakash says. “There is a lot of fight. I don’t know, there is the discrimination between—between the—”

“—refugee,” Shailesh suggests.

“—refugee and the Nepalese people. We are also Nepalese but we are [also] Bhutanese. And there is discrimination between Bhutanese Nepalese and the Nepalese. We are not supposed to bear that discrimination.”

I ask Shailesh if he also fought. “Only when I was small,” he answers. The brothers say everyone fought, regardless of age. “In our Bhutanese community, there is strong community. If anybody [is] discriminated by other people, they support. Before it happens a lot. Before they fight and they battle and they may kill sometimes. So they are afraid of Bhutanese now.”

I ask how they relate to Nepal and Bhutan now. Prakash answers, “I love my motherland Bhutan, but our culture and our traditional [ways], all are in Nepal. We are Nepali. When we are in Bhutan we are not allowed to celebrate our culture. That is why we back to Nepal as refugee.”

“[It was] not allowed to read the Nepali book,” Shailesh says. “Or speak Nepali. They said that you have to celebrate our festival.”

“We should not say that it is done [only] by the Drukpas,” Prakash tells us, “That was done by the—”

“Government,” both brothers say at the same time.

“Bhutan government,” Prakash nods. “Yeah.”

“After they are not allowed reading Nepali book our people ask about the human rights. They not give any of the rights to the Bhutanese people. Some army are come in the house and they take some parent from the house. They shoot the gun and killed sometime, and they put people in the jail. So many people are killed by the government. All the people—we move to Nepal.” Shailesh concludes.

“Yeah, we talk about all the things we come from—how we have come from Bhutan as a refugee. That’s the reason. I don’t know [if we will go back] but I think we will settle in US. For visiting, we may go there.” As Prakash speaks, his brother nods in agreement.

In the future, Prakash wants to study math like he did in Nepal, where he focused on business mathematics. “I am still trying to get the GED,” he says.

Shailesh tells us that “I also interested in studying in the United States. I think I have to get the GED, after I have to go to the college. I hope I will take the commerce and economic.”

As for jobs, “Whatever the work I got, I will do that,” Prakash says, and Shailesh answers the same. They want to stay in the Twin Cities, specifically Minneapolis. “We had never seen the snow before,” Prakash says. “It is good.”

When I ask if they want to add anything else, Prakash responds, “I want to give more thanks to the United States and the people whoever are in the United States. I want to give thanks to the organization that help us when we are in Nepal like UNHCR, Caritas Nepal. And special thanks to the US government and the

people.”

Shailesh’s response is that “when we are in Nepal we have no citizenship. We sit in Nepal seventeen years and they not give any citizenship.” Here, in the US, they are on a track to citizenship; they can apply for their Green Cards after a year and for citizenship in five. “I give thanks to the organization that helps the refugee, UNHCR, Caritas Nepal, Lutherans, Red Cross, and the organization that helps to resettle the refugee in the United States and the others country. I give thanks to all the people.”