My name is Navaraj "Raj" Lamichhane, and I am an alumnus of Bright Horizon Children's Home School (BHCHS), Nepal. My story is about tragedy, hard work, luck, leadership, miracle, and compassion. I graduated from Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) with a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and a Professional Sales Certificate in 2018. Currently, I graduated with an Executive MBA in Non-Profit Management from the University of Portland.

From BHCHS to America, I bring many life experiences, including working as a student senator, student ambassador, international student club president, admissions and financial services intern, energy research intern, program intern, program assistant, mathematics tutor, guitar teacher, and music director at the BHCHS where I grew up in Nepal. I have a passion for rural developments in renewable energy programs in electricity-strapped communities. My biggest wish is to eventually work for a clean energy company, perhaps eventually starting my own someday.

When I was 6 years old, I lost my mother. My father abandoned our family. Because nobody knows when I was born, I had to pick my birthday. I picked May 4th. May the 4th Be With You.

Though my siblings farmed out and scattered to relatives for shelter, I was lucky to go to school at BHCHS – a home for disadvantaged children in the hills of Kathmandu, Nepal. This was my first miracle. I studied hard at BHCHS for more than ten years and was accepted to high school in Kathmandu. To earn a living and pay for school tuition, I got a job tutoring mathematics.

I always dreamed of going to school in America. I wanted to explore the world, do something important with my life, and find a way to help others.

To save for my education, I continued teaching math and music (guitar lessons) and worked as a research intern for a global nonprofit, commuting 4 hours a day to and from Kathmandu to the children's home. It was a challenging time, but I hoped that someday, my life would change.

Then, another miracle came into my life. With support from my generous Swiss sponsors, Birgit Krneta, and Marlies Kornfeld, the founder of BHCHS, I started my undergraduate degree in Kathmandu. Then, two years later, another miracle: I met Dr. Beverly Questad, a kind, compassionate, and generous English teacher from Vancouver, Washington. Dr. Questad taught me how to write SAT essays and tackle critical reading. With her encouragement and support, I studied hard for the exams.

When the earthquakes hit Nepal in 2015, I feared for my life. But, I continued to study, took the TOEFL and SAT exams, applied to WSUV… and got accepted. I was the first transfer student from my school in Kathmandu to go to an American university.

In December 2015, with my U.S. student visa, two suitcases, funding from my Swiss sponsors for one semester, and free room and board at Dr. Questad's house – a 10-minute walk to campus – I arrived in America. It was the happiest day of my life.

When I needed school tuition support, I received campus scholarships and grants. My campus life at WSU Vancouver was very challenging financially, but I always got support. Another miracle came when I received the $4000 Vancouver Rotary Foundation scholarship to use toward my school at the WSU Vancouver campus, became the first student speaker at the scholarship recipient ceremony, thanked the donors, and networked with local Rotarians.

In 2018, I completed my undergrad studies at WSUV, earning a 3.4 GPA while working part-time on the campus. I've made many friends from different countries, learned many new cultures, and even got served at the Associated Students of Washington State University Vancouver (ASWSUV) multiple times.

Henri Moreau, the fellow Rotarian I met at the scholarship reception event, become one of my great friends and father figures, invited me to speak at the Vancouver Rotary Foundation monthly event to share my success story. After the story sharing session, I received a standing ovation. Dr. Richard K. Green, the former Vancouver Rotary Club President, and the Salmon Creek Plastic Surgeon saw something on me and offered to provide partial tuition assistance toward my graduate school studies. I picked the University of Portland for its rigorous Pamplin School of the business program and decided not to leave Southwest Washington.

After I graduated from the WSU Vancouver in 2018 and needed a school break, I lived with another American host family, Julie and Jeff Barclay, in Brush Prairie, Washington. I worked for a marketing firm in Beaverton, saved money for graduate school, learned to drive, and moved out when I received enough support to attend the University of Portland.

For many international students, it's not an easy transition to college life in America. School is expensive and challenging. I could not have come this far alone. I am grateful for all the support I received from many helping hands. They believed in me and prepared me well, and someday, I will offer a miracle to another student who has a dream to change his/her life, too.

I have a dream of becoming a social entrepreneur to help the disadvantaged people of my country. I plan to return home when I gain some years of work experience in the U.S. My biggest wish is to eventually work for a clean energy company and even start my own someday. I am excited to experience what the future holds.

I hope to make the best use of all the generosity and education to educate myself and to create a better future for my family, my community, and my country. Thank you all.