

TELL YOUR STORY

A refugee story of faith
and hope, told in words
and art.

Simon's Story



Tell Your Story celebrates the journey of participants from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) refugee backgrounds – including those currently seeking asylum. The aim is to both encourage hope and healing in participants, and to inspire faith, hope and understanding in others.

With training provided by experienced Salvation Army coaches, and with prompts/ questions provided, participants (looking through the lens of faith) use both their words and art forms to tell their stories. These are shared online and in booklet form.

Simon's story

My family and I family faced forced expulsion from Bhutan due to diplomatic tensions when I was just five. After my father's passing, my widowed mother and our family faced danger, hunger, hardship and persecution on our long journey to our new life in Australia. Despite many struggles, I now serve as a Christian ministry leader, and my life has been blessed and transformed through God's faithfulness and care.



From caterpillar to butterfly: God's beautiful transformation

"I am like this butterfly. When this butterfly was a larva or a caterpillar, nobody liked it. You couldn't touch, hug, or get close to it. But after it turned into a butterfly, people were attracted to it because of its beauty.

"God has transformed my life like this butterfly." – Simon

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV).

Right: Clay sculpture created to represent a verse in the Bible or personal message from God that has offered encouragement on the journey.

Below: The stunning mountains of Bhutan, the land of my birth.



God's faithfulness: From hunger, darkness and danger to a life serving Jesus

I was born in Bhutan and when I was five years old, we were forcefully expelled because of the diplomatic situation between Nepali people and the Bhutanese government.

My family was in a challenging situation because only two years earlier my father passed away. My mum was only 24 when she became a widow, with four children to look after. We had to deal with many difficulties. I still remember my mum saying, "We are going to a different country where we do not have anything. Over there we do not know anyone." She had less than the equivalent of two Australian dollars.

"WE ARE GOING TO A DIFFERENT COUNTRY WHERE WE DO NOT HAVE ANYTHING. OVER THERE WE DO NOT KNOW ANYONE."

When we arrived in Nepal, we lived in a jungle under an orange tarpaulin between two bamboo sticks with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission of Refugees) logo. When it was windy, we each had to hold a corner.



We rarely had enough food to eat. All my extended family lived together, but we were not treated the same by some members of the family. My mum gathered leftovers from the family, and she would sometimes not eat for long periods, to make sure her children ate.

They were hard times. People began kidnapping children from the refugee camps while they slept, and so my mother every night tied her kera (scarf) and lungi (belt) to each of us, then knotted it around her waist and held on to it through the night.

People were getting sick in the jungle. I was really sick for 18 months and my mother would carry me to the clinic for treatment – a walk of more than five kilometres.

Faith in Jesus: a new direction

After a great deal of sickness, my uncle converted to Christianity, as did my mum. She suffered a lot of persecution for changing her faith, but would always pray for our family saying, "It doesn't matter how hard a situation we must go through; God is always with us, his mercy is on our family."

My mum would cry to God in prayer, sometimes through the whole night. And help often would come – with different organisations offering schooling and food. Eventually, neighbours helped us build our (Jhopdai) bamboo house.

"It doesn't matter how hard a situation we must go through; God is always with us, his mercy is on our family."

My older brother started to work in school holidays. He earned 150 rupees in three days. When he got that money and gave it to Mum, she was very happy. It was also a very emotional moment because my father used to provide that money, and she missed those days.

Life had many challenges still. One day it was really freezing cold in my class, and my teacher asked me to go back home and get some warm clothes, so I went home and never came back because I did not have warm clothes to wear. We only had one pair of clothes that my mother would handwash and I never owned shoes until I was age 10.

Eventually my mum took old clothes from others and sewed them into outfits for us and we were so happy and proud to show them off.



Above and right: With my mother and siblings in Bhutan before we were taken to Nepal.



Growing from childhood to adulthood

From 14 years old, I began to work illegally as a labourer, bringing timber from the jungle and selling it to earn money. At the time, there was war between the government and terrorists, and if either group caught you, or the forest guard, they would punish you.

I was arrested many times and tortured.

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When I was 16, I met a girl named Sanu who would later become my wife.

After we married, I went to study higher education and Sanu worked to support me. I got a job in the central part of Nepal as a teacher at a Christian school, which led me to become a fully committed follower of Jesus and Sanu also became a committed Christian.

When our son was born in 2005, we were still living in a refugee camp, but were soon offered the opportunity to come to Australia. It usually takes a long and hard time to do the process, but the grace of God and hand of God was with our family and in a very quick time we were on our way.



Above: My family was provided with new clothes by the UNHCR once a year.

When we arrived in Cairns in 2010, I felt like we had landed in a desert with all the hot winds. Due to my English and strong accent, I would get so confused. It was very hard for me to have conversations with the community around me, but it got much easier over time.

I went to TAFE to learn English for three months and started working in a fast-food chain. Within 14 months, I was promoted from supervisor to assistant manager. I worked there for 12 years and then changed career to do disability work.

I am now serving God as a minister in our church with The Salvation Army, with my beautiful wife and our son and daughter (our great gifts from God). Our children today help out in church and in the worship team. Our family is now very happily settled in Cairns and The Salvation Army is our 'home'. God is so faithful!

Bible story:

My life echoes the journey of the Israelites, resembling their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Even though we weren't Christians at the start of our journey from Bhutan, God was so faithful. Everywhere we went, kind people helped us, including the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission of Refugees) and other organisations that provided education and food. God protected us on our perilous journey over many years.

We could have so easily been shot and killed, especially on our way to India, which served as a transit country before God opened the path to Australia.

My story also mirrors Joseph's.

Discrimination due to our faith followed us, bringing many hardships. We also lost my father, leaving my mother as a single parent struggling to provide for her children. Despite the difficulty, God truly became our spiritual Father in Heaven.

In Australia, I faced workplace discrimination due to my English skills. Colleagues insulted me, but God stood by me, and, like Joseph, I was promoted at work – not once but twice.

Below: Aged 17, with my wife who was pregnant with our first child.



Above: My soccer team in Nepal when I was in college.

Below right: About to depart for Australia with my family.

God's personal message to me remains simple: "It doesn't matter where you come from or your background; God loves you and is always there to help." Because of my background and situation, I never imagined I'd have the opportunity to serve God as I do (as a minister). However, God lifted me up, and working for him and his Kingdom is the greatest joy and privilege.

"He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:18, NIV).





BELIEVE IN GOOD