

## MUENSEL

Reflection from Alumni members of  
National Institute for the Visually Impaired-NIVI,  
40 years serving the blind and low vision,  
Khaling, Bhutan

Compiled on  
23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 2013.  
By Kuenga Chhoegyel,  
Teacher

## Table of Contents

Message from Founding Father Mr. Einar Kippenes. ....	3
Reflectory Note By Mrs. Gro Holm Rypestol .....	4
Message By Ms. Tshering Lhamo, Sr. Programme Officer .....	7
Reflection By Pema Dorji (Low Vision) .....	8
Message from Kishore Chhetri .....	11
Message from Gyembo Tenzin Bumthang. ....	11
Foundation Day message By Amrith.....	12
Message from Pema Chhogyel, Special Education Section .....	15

## **Message from Founding Father**

**Mr. Einar Kippenes.**

Dear Principal, teachers, students and friends at NIVI,

40 years seems to be quite a time-span, and this may bring NIVI into the status of seniority. However, considering the history of schools around in the kingdom it reveals the fact that NIVI is still young. Being young means NIVI is to be a vital and progressive institution seeking the best avenues for the various activities being beneficial for the visually impaired students it cares for.

So is the story behind this day. One should expect the first day of the history to contain a formal inauguration with colorful speeches and festive celebration. It was not so. A good meal was there but the main activity that first day was the English lesson in a small classroom. The simple sentence: “Open the door” – was digested and understood. It was a door opener into new words in a new world.

Since then the students of NIVI have opened more books, dug the garden, cooked their own meals, climbed the surrounding mountains, passed common exams, graduated and obtained a status in various professions. Many are employed. You are productive citizens of Bhutan. This has been achieved in a fair competition with those being sighted.

The aim from the first day in that small classroom was to develop an attitude of independence. The reason being each visually impaired child is equally valuable and able compared with the sighted. It was not the easiest task because the home societies from where the visually impaired children came had a rather low expectation to what their child could perform. The first students therefore had to take a long leap from the inherited understanding: “I am blind, therefore I do not

manage” till the opposite standing: “I shall overcome”. I think it was a good reason why the song: We shall overcome, - was quite popular in the beginning, and it may still be?

This is not to say that life is easy and that you get your reward free of cost. You may have to work harder to achieve your goals than those you compete with have to do. You may need more endurance and perseverance. We want to thank you for your work and efforts to reach your aims. Keep in mind that the opportunity you have got from being a student in an institute and being surrounded by dedicated teachers and staff is a gift. This is an opportunity to each one of you. Your school days are the foundation for your future.

Much has been achieved thanks to the enthusiastic and able teachers and staff at NIVI. You have experienced that new challenges appear as the work goes on. Almost every day gives a new test for your creativity and for finding new ways to present new knowledge. We would like to give you honor for your commitment and daily work. You are paving the road of knowledge and hope for the future for your students.

This is the way to go. The students of NIVI are valuable people because of the value God has granted them.

Best wishes to all friends during the celebration from us here.

Einar.

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## **Reflectory Note**

**By**

**Mrs. Gro Holm Rypestol**

**(Teacher of NIVI 1974-1979)**

Just a retrospective glance and some words to follow.

The years that I spent in Khaling ,in School for the Blind and in Dawzor, were some of the best I've ever had. They were the highlight of my Youth. I was some 26 years old when I arrived in the beginning of 1974.

Everything was new to me. But I soon came to know that it was the very same situation for the blind children that came to stay in our school. They were Bhutanese OK, but the moving to Khaling from their safe and well known home and house was just as drastic and radical as it was for me to move from Norway to Bhutan. We were somewhat experiencing the same. That was a consoling and good thought for me, and a source of understanding and compassion.

In the beginning I was ment to concentrate on deaf children, but decided very soon that it would be much better for me to continue the work with the blind. I shall never forget the day I started to teach Tobgyel, Kuenga Chhoegyel and Wangdi. It was a remarkable day. I talked English all the time, for hours on end, and I do not think the 3 boys understood more than a handful words. Even so they sat quietly on their chairs, listening to me telling stories and reading stories. You were indeed the most patient students ever.

But the most important was not what I during all the years taught the students, but what I learnt from them. You are all, each and everyone, my pride and joy. I'm so thankful that I was given the opportunity to get to know you. I don't think one single day has passed since I left Bhutan, in which I have not thought of each of you and the Lovely country of yours. You have marked my life for ever. In such a way that I still carry you in my heart and prayers.

Greet all the students of today, and all the teachers and helpers in the school.

Love from Lopen Gro

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**Message****By****Ms. Tshering Lhamo, Sr. Programme Officer****(Officiating and vice principal of NIVI 2002-2010)****From: Tshering Lhamo <tsheringped@gmail.com> Sent: Tue 2/19/2013 4:18 PM****To: Kuenga Chhoegyel**

Dear Sir,

Sorry for I am able to read your mail only now for our internet line was out due to snowfall damage. My reflection on the days in the institute was "My work experience has enriched my understanding about the VIPs, their skills/talents which others think of otherwise as incapable". It was indeed great challenge and an opportunity for me to work with the VIPs, that others who don't have missed this charm. The memories will be cherished and I always look forward to serve and support with little capacity I have.

I wish I could join you in this great occasion. Wish you all a very happy celebration. I will miss you all and the occasion. Remembering and missing you all.

Tshering Lhamo

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**Reflection**

**By**

**Pema Dorji (Low Vision)**

My Sincere Message for the Foundation Day

As far as I know, the story begins from 1999 and it continues even today... It would be monotonous to talk about the academic reforms the institute brings to the students because almost everybody, if not all thinks that the sole purpose of any school is to inculcate academic values in students. But to talk the truth, NIVI's contributions in academic field are something extra-ordinary. The numbers of resource material that are available now have progressed a lot just in front of our eyes. Similarly, the ever succeeding performance of the students and the way they expose to the normal friends of two other main-stream schools is yet another achievement of NIVI that is worth mentioning. And the ICT facility that the institute is equipped with is a blessing in general to all.

Now I should say that the development in ICT is the biggest achievement; yearly we see batches of students coming out equipped with ICT knowledge and its applications.

NIVI is a real home for all the students when we talk in terms of the achievements in other wholesome educational areas. The visual impairments do not obstruct any person who has graduated from NIVI in their life because of the numerous useful activities the institute organizes. NIVI has made every visually impaired student fairly independent. We have the Orientation and Mobility Exercise, Activities of Daily Living and basic Driglam sessions being conducted frequently. Teachers take the role of parents in helping the students in all the ways they can.

And to this point, I must say that I too have enjoyed all above facilities in my thirteen years of stay in Khaling. I owe my respect and gratitude to the teachers, friends and other faculty members for making me what I am today.

Needless to talk about the skills that students gain during their stay in NIVI in various other fields like games and sports, culture, value education, creativity and so on because the nation as a whole is witnessing all these abilities wrested in every visually impaired child.

I therefore, would like to genuinely inform all my younger brothers and sisters there in NIVI to learn as much as you can, have fun and take every opportunity you get to become the best. We in the name of our disabilities cannot take things for granted because the time has now come where we have to stand on our own and earn the bread. Somebody has rightly said, "No one saves us, but ourselves. No

one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path.” Remember this and do your best.

I join NIVI youngsters in equally extending our heartfelt gratitude to the Royal Government of Bhutan, Norwegian Aid Development, Faculties of NIVI and all other supporters for your immense contributions in upbringing the status of visually impaired children along with other disabled citizens of Bhutan in relation to all normal citizens. We thank each and every one of you from the core of our heart and we will keep appreciating your further supports in improving the lives of innocent visually impaired children of Bhutan who are otherwise capable in everything if given opportunities.

I join this auspicious day in wishing a very “Happy 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY Day of NIVI, serving the visually impaired of the Nation”.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Pema Dorji (Low Vision)

B.A., LL.B (Hons).

NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad

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**Message****From****Kishore Chhetri**

“We need 3 teachers to go to Gomdar immediately. Two boys from the same family need our urgent intervention” said Sir Nawang, over a cup of coffee as we sat under the Sun during the tea-recess. Three hands shot up, not realizing one was mine as usual. “Three is a good number”, he approved.

Volunteering was one thing that I learned and picked up at NIVI and so did many other friends there. We would accompany students on their weekend walks. Teachers would transcribe books and occasionally visit students’ homes in their villages when required. Many other works and activities followed...

I am a volunteer today and I would continue to be one... My hand goes up once more! This time... it is not that someone is asking me to come forward to do this or that... but I am asking if I can be at NIVI once again!

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**Message****From****Gyembo Tenzin Bumthang.**

Dearest Sirs and disabled fellows,

On this very important historic Foundation Day on 23rd of February 2013 respectively, I would like to joint my other Bhutanese disabled colleagues in

wishing the National Institute for the Visually Impaired a very happy momentous joyful occasion heartedly. May the everlasting peace and success always shine on the Institute with prosperity in everyone's ongoing lifetime.

We are indeed so grateful to the Royal Government of Bhutan for being able to establish the institution ever since 1973 from which many persons with visual impairment came out successfully in serving the nation. Our hearty thanks also goes to the Norwegian mission for continually supporting the developmental activities of NIVI.

Tashi Delek to you all and may the Almighty bless you so forever!

Warmest regards from this religious heartland of Bumthang.

Gembo Tenzin and family.

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**Foundation Day message**

**By**

**Amrith**

The moment I received an email requesting for an article about how NIVI has contributed to my personal and professional life, it straightaway dragged my imagination to the conditions of the lives of so-called visually impaired people in Bhutan before 1973 and the difference NIVI has been able to make after its establishment. It is clear to everybody that NIVI has made a huge difference in the lives of many visually impaired Bhutanese over the past forty years and it's truly painful to imagine what could have happened to all of us had there been no such an institute established.

Although the institute has undergone quite significant change in its infrastructures today, the old landscape in which I grew up as a student still lingers afresh at the back of mind. The old hostel which provided me shelter for eleven years, the kitchen and the dining hall which me fed me for years and the sacred academic building where I received the first light of education can never fade away from my memories. The institute had really been my second home where I got even more than what I would have got from my actual home: love, care and guidance from the teachers and friends. It really served as a "home away from home" because it never made me miss my actual home throughout my academic life in the institute. In addition to academic learning, I have also learned values and confidence from the institute that have been guiding me forward even to this day. The Institute has significantly shaped both my personal and professional life and I have gained a new outlook of the world around me. I am truly thankful to the teachers who served as my second parents at the Institute for their consistent care and guidance.

Today, I am a counselor by profession and I should say I am able to comfortably fulfill my duty. I am confident that this would not have been possible if the Institute had not groomed me well. I am also a successful family man since I am able to look after my children and help my wife in cooking, washing and cleaning like any other man. However, I should confess that these skills are not self-learned. I am grateful for NIVI for providing us with independent living skills which play a huge role in my daily life. People around me wonder in amazement when they see

me do the household chores independently and I make it a point to let them know that I have learned all those skills from NIVI in Khaling. So, my ability to interact and socialize with people from any society today and the professionalism with which I have been able to carry out my professional duty, all reflect the tremendous contributions made by the Institute to my life. In short, I should say that I have found the real purpose and meaning of life at the Institute. I cannot still imagine what would have been my life like, had I not joined the Institute on time or had the Institute been not there at all. The time may pass by with days, weeks, months and years, but I can never forget how NIVI has made me a proud citizen of Bhutan. On this joyous occasion of the 40th Foundation Day of the Institute, I would like to take the opportunity to heartily thank all the teachers and non-teaching staff of the Institute, both past and present, for their unwavering support and services till date. May the Institute continue to pave new ways for the visually impaired citizens of Bhutan and produce many more promising graduates every year.

Tashi Delek.

(Amrith Bdr Subba)

Counsellor,

Youth Center Division, Dept. of Youth and Sports, MoE.

Thimphu: Bhutan.

(Currently undertaking Masters of Counselling under Endeavour scholarship at Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia)

**Message****From****Pema Chhogyel, Special Education Section**

“May the institute which has served the persons with visually disabled in Bhutan for years prosper with success and glory every moment.

Thank you to the founders, teachers, staff, students and everyone who have been part of the institute.

May the place continue to be the light, source of happiness and nurturer to all persons with disabilities in Bhutan.”

Thank you and Trashi Delek,

Pema Chhogyel

Special Education Section

Ministry of Education,

Thimphu, Bhutan.

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