

Pursuing a Passion: Making a Dream Come True

Thrinlay Dorji in conversation with Tenzin Rabgye

Thrinlay Dorji, 29 years old, was born in Bartsham, Tashigang, and raised by his aunt and uncle in Thimphu. His life's journey—from struggling young student to creative professional—is a story that is often by-passed in the expectations of most youth, most parents, and by society. It is a story worth telling, and worth thinking about.

Thrinlay studied hard but “did not do well” in school. His marks in most subjects were poor. He was at the bottom of his class. But Thrinlay was creative and hard working. He developed an interest in technology and the audio-visual media, without even knowing the terminology, and focused on it. More than that, he had a streak in his character that would not allow him to give up.

“Thrinlay was always taking apart electric appliances in our house and making little science projects,” recalls Kuenzang, his older sister. “He had a fascination with seeing how things worked. I remember him making a replica of a water mill using the motor from a Walkman for a science project. He has always been creative.”

After completing high school, Thrinlay pursued his interests and applied for a job with the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) as a cameraman. He was rejected twice, over four years, but did not give up. He continued training with a private company to hone his skills and, on his third attempt, five years after completing high school, he was recruited as a cameraman.

Six years later, Thrinlay is a visual editor and cameraman at BBS. He covers exciting stories, important national events, and is happy in his profession. The television audience may not know but they have watched Thrinlay's work on BBS television. One of his most notable documentaries is his programme about Bhutan helping out with the relief efforts in Nepal after the earthquake in 2015. All the news stories on BBS about the relief efforts were also Thrinlay's work. Other teasers on the BBS news include the one about the BBS radio channels as well as the one with the BBS anthem *Druk gi jangda legzin BBS*.

“The committee which interviewed Thrinlay did not choose him at the time because he did not have the relevant experience,” said Tshewang Rinzin, a senior Visual Editor working with the BBS for the last 16 years. “There were several interns with the BBS who were a better choice at the time. We are glad that he persevered and is part of the BBS family today.”

The writer of this article, Tenzin Rabgye, recalls asking His Majesty the King as a young university graduate: “What I can do for my country?”

His Majesty’s answer was: “Make sure that you do the best that you can do, whatever it is you do.” He understood the profound message: No matter who you are—a driver, a nurse, a doctor, a carpenter, a lawyer, a contractor and in his case at the time a journalist—you must ensure that you do the best you can because, at the end of the day, what each and every one of us does, is somehow connected to the way our beloved country works.

Thrinlay’s story is vindication that it is not always about topping your class, being an honors’ student, becoming a pilot or a doctor or an engineer or a celebrity. Being successful is about standing on your own feet and making sure that you are contributing to your country, in whatever way you possibly can.

How do you do that? Be someone who faces failure and rejection multiple times, but keeps trying to ensure that your dreams come true. Be someone with the determination to serve your country the best way you can.

Tenzin Rabgye (TR) interviewed Thrinlay Dorji (TD) for the Druk Journal’s fourth issue on the theme “Youth Matters”. Thrinlay’s is not an extraordinary achievement but, at a time when Bhutanese youth face many challenges and many opportunities in a country going through rapid change, what does his story tell other youth? What are the lessons that youth must draw from their successes, from their failures? What does it say about Bhutanese society and its values?

TR: *Tell me about your childhood, your parents, where were you brought up?*

TD: I was nine months old when my biological parents made the decision to hand me over to my mother’s older sister in Thimphu. Both my parents are from Bartsham, Trashigang. My aunt’s husband during that time was working in the armed force. I was brought up as their child in Dechenchholing.

I was too young to ask my biological parents why I was given to my aunt and, when I was old enough, it was awkward for me to ask either my biological or foster parents. But today, I take so much pride in saying I have two fathers and two mothers who all love me and are very supportive.

So I spent all my life in Thimphu—my childhood, my school days, and now as a working adult. I am the person I am today because of the inspiration, support and love my foster parents give me.

TR: *What about your school life? Why do you suppose it was difficult for you to do well in school?*

TD: I was the kind of student who was not good in studies but hardworking in extra-curricular activities and social work. Unlike my friends, whose ambitions were to become doctors and engineers, I did not dream big because I knew I was not a bright student. From an early age, I knew that I wanted to work in a field that I was interested in.

I think everyone is different. We all have things that we are good at doing. Mine wasn't academic studies.

TR: *Since when did you want to work in the BBS? What was the biggest inspiration?*

TD: After completing Class XII, I did not qualify for college. My parents wanted me to pursue my studies in India, which I did not agree to. I thought it would just be a waste as I was not a bright student.

Instead of continuing my education, I thought it would be better for me to look for a job. Ever since I was a teenager, I was a technical person. In high school, I was the "Sound In-Charge" which meant that, whenever there were events at the school, I had to take charge of setting up the sound system. I have somehow always been fascinated with technology.

My biggest inspiration was my brother-in-law who was a cameraman. Seeing him holding a video camera and telling stories through the lens inspired me to dream of becoming one as well some day.

TR: *How did you work towards fulfilling your dream?*

TD: I started working as a camera assistant with a freelance documentary filmmaker after I did not qualify for further studies. I learnt the basic camera operation from him. Travelling with him to remote villages and filming stories invigorated me. It cemented the feeling that my passion lay behind the camera.

So, in 2008, when BBS announced vacancies for cameramen, it was the perfect opportunity for me to pursue my dream job. To my dismay, I was not selected. I continued working with the documentary filmmaker, honing my skills as a cameraman, learning all that I could. After almost two years, I tried my luck again as a cameraman in BBS. Once again, I failed to impress the organisation.

But I did not give up. In 2011, an opportunity presented itself yet again to try for the post of BBS cameraman. By then I had more than three years experience as a camera assistant at the private documentary firm. On my third attempt, I was finally employed as a cameraman in the BBS.

TR: *You were rejected two times before you finally got the job, what made you persevere?*

TD: “There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible—the fear of failure”, a quote from Paulo Coelho. I have learned to embrace my failures. That has become my biggest inspiration.

I decided that nothing was going to stop me from achieving my dreams and learning even more. I normally google or go to YouTube when I don’t know how to do certain things. I have come to learn a lot with the help of the Internet.

I also believe that “When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it”, another quote from Paulo Coelho.

TR: *What is one of your favourite memories while working at the BBS?*

TD: One of my favourite memories as a cameraman and visual editor at BBS was when I was assigned with a reporter to cover the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015. We followed Bhutan’s first international medical relief team sent to help Nepal with its rescue efforts. As a part of the team, we camped at Trishuli, in Nuwakot district, one of the worst hit areas, for more than three weeks. My colleague and I had an experience that we will remember all our lives, filming and reporting on how Bhutan assisted Nepal in its relief efforts. Filming the impact

of the earthquake, with aftershocks multiple times a day, walking for hours with Bhutan's medical team, and listening to the stories of the affected people was unforgettable. It made me feel a sense of pride being able to tell the stories of all these people to the rest of the world. Maybe in some way our documentary helped these people get assistance from others as well.

Our hard work paid off when the documentary "Helping Nepal" won the best documentary category at the Bhutan Film Association awards and also at the annual journalism awards. The icing on the cake was receiving an audience with His Majesty the King for all members of the team who went to assist Nepal. It was a very inspiring moment for all of us.

TR: *What is your idea of success?*

TD: My idea of success is very simple. Success for me is working in the field that I love. Success for me is also being thankful for all the failures that have moulded me to be a stronger person today. Success is being able to provide for myself and help my loved ones. I believe that it is because of the people around me that I have been able to come this far in life.

TR: *What plans do you have for the future?*

TD: Just continue doing what I love and being a good cameraman and visual editor. To keep learning new things and improving my skills. To tell stories through the lenses of my camera.

I also plan to travel to remote unexplored parts of the country filming documentaries. It will be great to one day tell my children and grandchildren the stories of the places I visited and the important historical events that I was a part of documenting and sharing with the world. In a sense I believe that, through my work, through the videos and pictures that I capture, my name will live on even when I have left this earth. They will be my link with future generations. Through my work they can get an understanding of the person I was and the life I have lived.

TR: *What do you think of the youth today?*

TD: Compared with my generation, I feel that youth today have so much pressure to perform well both academically and in life too. Because of it, they are stressed out.

I feel youth today should focus, work hard in whatever they do and be responsible citizens.

His Majesty the King, in one of his speeches to graduates, said: “If there is anything your heart desires, anything you want to achieve, the time is now. Don’t be afraid of obstacles and challenges.”