

SUBHASH GHIMIRE '10 HAS ESTABLISHED
A SUMMER CAMP, SCHOLARSHIP FUND,
LIBRARY, AND MORE IN A REGION OF HIS
NATIVE NEPAL HIT HARD BY VIOLENCE.

HUMANITY *in* ACTION

By Kari VanDerVeen

IN A REMOTE, WAR-RAVAGED VILLAGE in western Nepal that has neither roads nor electricity, hope has long been something that fades quickly in the face of overwhelming poverty and violence.

But a seemingly simple initiative last summer began to change that. Children who once sketched guns began drawing birds and books instead. They formed friendships that breached the country's rigid caste system. And those who had witnessed the murders of their parents and siblings during the country's decade-long civil war slowly began to open up and reach out to others.

It was all the result of a six-week summer camp for children designed and implemented by St. Olaf senior Subhash Ghimire. Using a \$10,000 grant he received from Davis Projects for Peace, an initiative



The Fulbari Summer Camp in Arupokhari, Nepal, was established by



St. Olaf senior Subhash Ghimire. During Christmas break this past winter, Ghimire purchased ten acres of nearby land on which to build the Sarswati Peace School.

that funds student proposals for grassroots projects, Ghimire returned to the village where he was born with a plan to help some of its youngest residents. He founded the Fulbari Summer Camp, a program that uses traditional song, dance, theater, and other teaching aids to help children overcome the scars of war and the country's caste system.

It was unlike anything the village of Arupokhari — or any other community in Nepal — had seen before, and residents embraced it wholeheartedly. “I think the camp helped galvanize the community to share its painful past,” Ghimire says. “It was an excellent opportunity for villagers to reflect and pledge to come together in trying times.”

Yet his efforts didn't end there. In addition to managing a sixteen-member team and forty-two children during the successful summer camp, he created a scholarship fund, established a library, and launched a foundation to support youth movements. For the first time, the children of Arupokhari had access to more than 1,600 books, two computers, and scholarships that enabled them to afford school tuition and books for an entire year.

“I could see in people's eyes how thankful they were,” Ghimire says. What he also saw in their eyes — and heard in the voices of the villagers who waited in line for hours to meet him and share their personal stories — was that the people of Nepal needed more. As he left the country and returned to St. Olaf for his senior year, Ghimire felt a deep responsibility to find other ways to help his native country. So between classes and campus activities, he began connecting with activists from around the world. He spoke at the European Summit for Global Transformation in Rotterdam, Netherlands, sharing his story on an international platform. And he developed a new plan to help villagers in Arupokhari: build a peace school to provide more than 250 war-affected children with a world-class education.

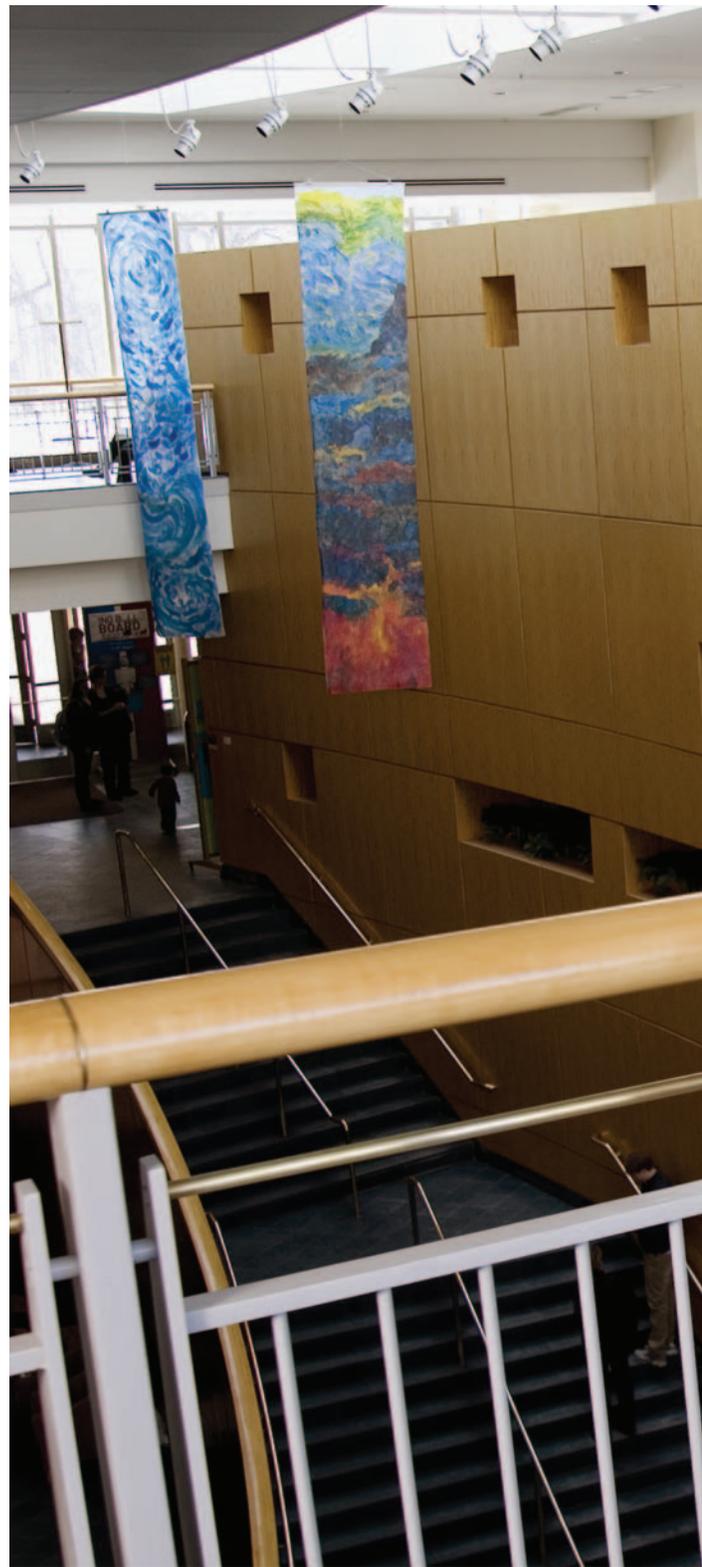
“Youth are the only hope for Nepal,” Ghimire says. “I want to change the way they look at themselves and the nation and help bring about a better future for all of us.”

GHIMIRE KNOWS FIRSTHAND that education holds the key to a better future. At age ten he scored well on a national exam given in Nepal and was awarded a scholarship to attend the prestigious Budhanil-kantha School in Kathmandu. Leaving his village for the boarding school provided Ghimire with his first glimpses of modern conveniences such as buses and electricity. It also gave him the opportunity to take rigorous classes, learn English, and form friendships with children from a variety of backgrounds.

Yet leaving his family behind wasn't easy. Nepal's civil war broke out the year he left for school, and his village was hit hard by the fighting. His father, Rabilal, a teacher, was abducted several times by the Maoist rebels fighting against the Nepalese government forces, and for several years the war prevented Ghimire from returning home to visit his family. To make matters worse, his mother, Sarswati, died from a stomach ulcer shortly after he left for school, a death that could have been prevented if only she had access to basic medical care.

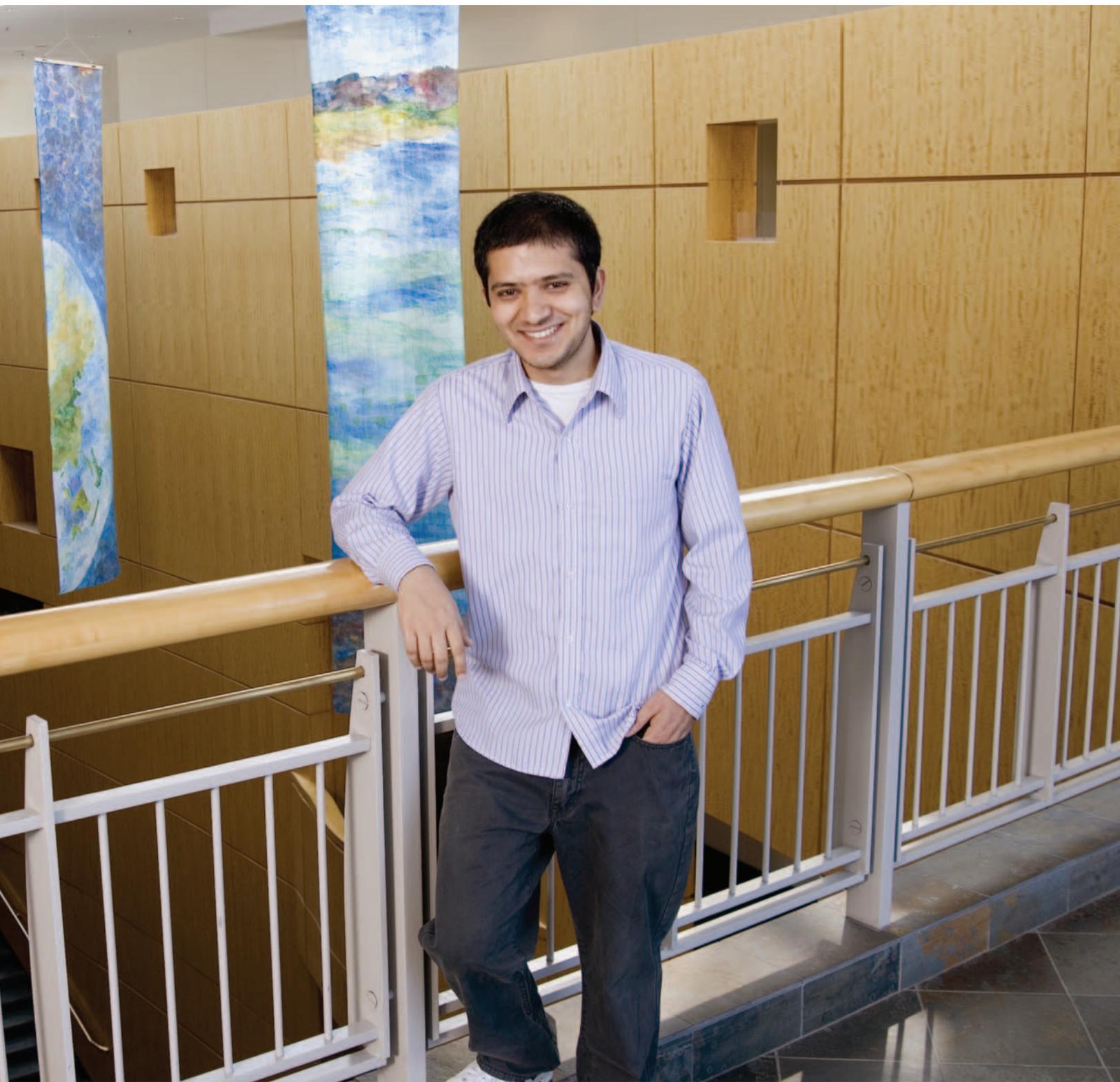
“It was at that point that I realized I had to find a way to turn all this tragedy into something good,” Ghimire says.

So he threw himself into a variety of school activities. As a high school junior, he worked with other students to organize a three-day health camp. Utilizing the school's alumni network, they convinced doctors and nurses to donate their time to area residents who didn't have access to medical care. The students then raised money to buy



In early March Ghimire was awarded the prestigious Humanity in Action (HIA) fellowship and will spend his first summer as a St. Olaf alumnus in Europe, engaged with international leaders of human rights organizations, politicians, diplomats, philanthropists, journalists, scholars, artists, and authors. HIA Fellows focus on the histories and theories of resistance to legal and institutional abuse of minority populations and the development of international human rights institutions and doctrines after World War II and the Holocaust.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BILL KELLEY.



“CHANGING A CULTURE IS DIFFICULT AND REQUIRES A LOT OF TIME, BUT SOMEONE HAS TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.” – SUBHASH GHIMIRE '10

medicine and supplies. Over the course of three days, the camp provided medical care for more than 5,000 people. “It instilled in me the idea that serving others, especially those less fortunate than ourselves, is the best thing we can do,” Ghimire says.

After graduating from the Budhanilkantha School in 2005, he worked various jobs for a year to help pay for his brother and sister, Dilip and Anglia, to attend school. Knowing that the best way he could help those around him was to continue his own education, Ghimire left Nepal to attend McKendree University in Illinois. He became president of the university’s Model United Nations team, and it was during a competition that he met a group of St. Olaf students who made such an impression on him that he transferred schools.

AS HE IMMERSSED HIMSELF in campus activities on the Hill — he’s a member of the St. Olaf Model United Nations Club, a student organization that participates in realistic simulations of United Nations meetings; he is helping create a new club called Celebrate South Asia; and earlier this year he helped organize a benefit concert for earthquake victims in Haiti — Ghimire also looked for new opportunities to promote peace and justice. With the encouragement and support of faculty and staff, he applied for the Davis Scholars grant with a project proposal that focused on beginning the healing process for war-affected children in Nepal. “I am aware that changing a culture is difficult and requires a lot of time, but someone has to make the first move,” he says.

Ghimire’s “first move” quickly turned into several initiatives. In addition to establishing the summer camp, he gave each participant a fifty dollar scholarship that paid for a year of schooling and books. He founded the Sarswati Memorial Library in honor of his mother, starting its collection with a wide array of donated books and computers he was able to gather. And he established the Sarswati Foundation (sarswatifoundation.org), which aims to help the country’s young people lead movements in health, education, democracy, and human rights.

“For a long time, the Nepalese youth haven’t had anything to look forward to, haven’t had any hope. But there’s a new republic now, and the whole country is in transition,” Ghimire says. “If youth can be a part of this process, it will create a huge change.”

He also pledged to increase the scholarship fund in coming years in order to ensure that more children in the village have access to an education — a promise he honored when he learned shortly after returning to the United States that he had received a scholarship from the Vincent L. Hawkinson Foundation for Peace and Justice. Ghimire plans to use part of the \$3,000 award to attend a human rights law program at Cambridge University and is putting another portion of it toward the scholarship fund he established.

PAYING IT FORWARD

- (1) Subhash Ghimire created the Sarswati Memorial Library in honor of his mother. (2) Dance is an integral part of village celebrations in Nepal. (3) Ghimire and his team of volunteers from the Fulbari Summer Camp. (4) Ghimire partnered with Polish mountain climber Ania Lichota to found the Sarswati Peace School. Lichota is climbing Mount Everest this spring to raise money for the school. (5) Ghimire’s home village of Arupokhari is in a remote area of the western Himalayas.



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PHOTOS 1-4 COURTESY OF SUBHASH GHIMIRE. PHOTO 5 COURTESY OF RAJESH KC.

STILL WANTING TO DO MORE for the children of Arupokhari, Ghimire partnered with Ania Lichota, an investment banker and experienced mountain climber that he met at the European Summit for Global Transformation. Together, they founded the Sarswati Peace School. Lichota, who through her climbing has raised money (for UNICEF and an orphanage in her native Poland), plans to climb Mount Everest this spring and will donate money raised through that climb to the Peace School.

The goal of the school — which will be a multicasite, secular center — is to educate children impacted by war using a curriculum specifically designed with their emotional needs in mind. The school also will include a child psychology department that will provide individual care and parent-child counseling sessions for those affected by war and violence.

The school is already well under way. During Christmas break, Ghimire traveled to Nepal and purchased about ten acres of land on which to build the school using funds provided by Lichota. He's also assembled a team of education professionals in Nepal, the United States, and Europe who will help oversee the development of the school. Organizers plan to begin construction of the school this August and will welcome its first students in the spring of 2011.

Finding qualified teachers inspired Ghimire to establish a Teach for Nepal program that mirrors Teach for America. Ghimire connected with several leaders of Teach for All — an organization launched in 2007 to help social entrepreneurs establish programs similar to Teach for America in countries around the world — and convinced the organization that Nepal needs the program. An executive from Teach for All will travel to Nepal to help get the program off the ground by providing training and seed money.

“The more involved I get in the work, the more passionate I become,” says Ghimire, who plans to get these initiatives up and running before he pursues graduate school.

There 's no end to his ideas for helping the people of Nepal. He would like eventually to build more peace schools throughout the country, establish a microfinancing project to provide struggling families with loans to start small businesses, start a program to educate Nepalese women to basic literacy levels, hold a “national ideas festival” to encourage young people to share their ideas for transforming society, and found a learning resource center in western Nepal to provide computer training. He also has dreams of one day opening Nepal's first mental health hospital and its own international liberal arts college.

It sounds like a tall order for someone who hasn't yet graduated from college, but Ghimire has already proven that a little determination goes a long way.

“I have learned how small efforts can bring about a sea of change in many people's lives,” he says. “It isn't hard to make our world a wonderful place in which to live.” 🐉

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