

ACP: Positive Engagement

Story of Pema Tshering

He was diagnosed with cerebral palsy when he was a child, but that has not stopped artist Pema Tshering from being one of the most recognised painters and wood-carvers in Bhutan.

Using only his feet, Pema holds a chisel and hammer, nimbly carving his way through a piece of wood as he tells us his story about being abandoned at birth, encountering the Queen Mother who subsequently adopted him, and how he eventually became an artist.

Paralysed from the hip up, the 31-year-old artist has lived almost his entire life using his feet as his hands. Despite his handicap, Pema has managed to eke out a living selling his creations at a small shop set up inside the compounds of Simply Bhutan museum in Thimphu.



Pema Tshering uses only his feet to create artwork. (Source: Bhutan Times)

Abandoned by his parents when he was 6

Except that he was born in Mongar district to farmer parents, Pema does not reveal much about his early childhood. The one thing he has to tell was that he was abandoned at the tender age of six when his parents found out that he had cerebral palsy.

But it wasn't just this impairment that they had to deal with – Pema also had congenital deformities in his spinal column, resulting in limited use of his legs. Left to his grandparents' care, Pema started learning how to use his feet as his hands. For 20 years, he lived in the village making bows and arrows out of bamboo. Education was out of the question.

Meeting the Queen Mother

When Pema was 18, Her Majesty the Queen Mother Tshering Pem Wangchuk paid a visit to his village, where she chanced upon him.

Supporting his parents

He's done well in his line of work that he now supports his parents financially – a responsibility he feels he has to take on despite their decision to abandon him when he was a child.

Pema shared his philosophy behind this: "I want to help my parents because if you don't help your parents, it's like disrespecting them. If you don't respect your parents, whatever work you do, you'll be unsuccessful in life."

Participated in 2005 Bhutanese Paralympics

Besides establishing a career in art, Pema also participated in the 2005 Bhutanese Paralympic as an archer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5fSHcpTAHc&pp=ygUZcGVtZSB0c2hlcmluZyBmb290IGFydGlzdA%3D%3D>