

Trotting down the memory lane

Prof. Ishwar Lohani

Chief of Plastic Surgery and Burns and Deputy Director of Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Email: ilohani@hotmail.com

Born on 1962 at Kamaladi, Kathmandu, Prof Ishwar Lohani completed School Leaving Certificate from St. Xavier's School, Lalitpur, followed by Senior Cambridge 'O' Level from Cambridge University 1980 and Proficiency Certificate Level from Amrit Science Campus. 1984.

He did B. Muse. (Sangeet Prabhakar) in Tabala from Kalanidhi Sangit Manavidyalaya under Prayag Sangit Samiti, Allahabad. 1983.

He completed M.B.B.S Degree from Madurai Medical College under Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamilnadu, India. 1991 and MS General Surgery from PGIMER, Chandigarh, India. 1994.

After completion of M.Ch. Plastic Surgery from PGIMER, Chandigarh, India in 1997, he worked initially as a Senior Medical Officer for few months and later as Senior Resident in the Dept. of Surgery, Chandigarh Medical College. He completed fellowship in Plastic Surgery as PSEF International fellow from University of Southern California, Los Angeles and California Pacific Medical Center, San Francisco May 2001 to Feb 2002 under Dr. Randy Sherman and Dr. Bryant Toth. He later did fellowship in Plastic Surgery through the Scottish Foundation for Surgery in Nepal at St. John's Hospital, Livingstone and Canniesburn Hospital Glasgow, England from Jan 17, 2003 to Feb 28, 2003 under Dr. Auf Quaba and Dr. David Soutar.

Presently working as Professor and Head of Department, Dept. of Plastic Surgery and Burns at the T.U. Teaching Hospital, Maharajgunj, Kathmandu, Nepal. He has been involved in the training of MBBS, MS (General Surgery) and MCh Plastic surgery graduates at the Maharajgunj Medical Campus.

He served as the President of the International College of Surgeons (ICS) Nepal Section; General Secretary of Association of Plastic Surgeons of Nepal (APSON). He has been member of Society of Surgeons of Nepal since 1996 and has contributed a lot in the activities of the society. He has presented in numerous National and International conferences and has numerous publications in international and national journals as well. He served as the Chief Editor of the Journal of Society of Surgeons of Nepal 2008 – 2014.

Considering the history of Plastic Surgery in the world, which started from 600 BC during the days of Sushrut in Varanasi, its history in Nepal is very new. During the sixties when there was just a trickle of general surgeons coming back to Nepal after studying abroad and, had started working at Bir Hospital. Despite poor facilities for surgery they were able to do a commendable job. They had no choice but to put their expertise into maximum use and even do cleft lip and palate and skin grafting for burns. I was quite surprised to come across a case of silicon mammary implant done 30 years ago by one of our very senior surgeon and the patient came for its removal as it

had it ruptured during mammography. The radiographer probably did not realize that there is an implant inside. There is no proper documentation except for anecdotal evidence of any plastic surgery done even forty years ago in this country.

It was only in the eighties when Prof. Keshav Das Joshi joined Bir Hospital and started regular plastic surgery service; birth of plastic surgery took place in Nepal. This is why we affectionately call him the 'Father of Plastic Surgery in Nepal' or otherwise Harold Gilles of Nepal. It was his dedication and passion that fueled the journey of

plastic surgery in this country to what it is today. He set up a very active unit at Bir Hospital and the burn patient could avail standard burn care. Even though there was a burn unit at the TU Teaching Hospital but was being managed by general surgeons and dermatologists. After Prof. Joshi's retirement from he involved himself in teaching and training of young enthusiasts in plastic surgery, first at Kathmandu Medical College, Sinamangal and later at Cleft and Burn Center at Model Hospital, Kirtipur. He is still very actively involved in practice and teaching of plastic surgery and is the first president of Association of Plastic Surgeons of Nepal (APSON). At KMC Prof. Joshi was being supported by Prof. Shambhu Nath who is a very experienced plastic surgeon. Prof. Nath who spent most of his time in foreign countries is heading the plastic surgery unit at KMC.

Next person who deserves a lot of accolades for his efforts in developing plastic surgery in Nepal is Prof. Shanker Man Rai. After finishing his MBBS from the Institute of Medicine he was in pursuit of his passion in surgery when he came across visiting plastic surgery teams from various countries which really lured him into this field. He was really fascinated seeing the results of the surgeries done by the teams, especially cleft lip and palate, which transformed the child and the effect seen on the face of parents, was quite overwhelming. He is also equally involved in teaching and training of residents at the Cleft and Burn Center at Kirtipur. The MCh program in plastic surgery is being run there under the NAMS program. The burn center at Kirtipur is an example of his hard work and dedication and has been providing an exemplary service to the people of Nepal. He has been very instrumental in establishing the first skin bank in this country. Very soon, in collaboration with NAMS and various other hospitals he is going to start a fellowship program in hand and microsurgery.

During my MS General Surgery postgraduate studies at PGIMER Chandigarh, I was having a dilemma whether to be just a general surgeon or pursue further superspeciality. Rotating in various surgery departments during the MS general surgery course, I was quite fascinated by the work being done in plastic surgery. The results of the reconstructive procedures were enough for me to provide impetus to pursue this field in future. Apart from Prof. KD Joshi there were no other plastic surgeons in the country. Dr. Rai was still in the US doing his fellowship. I thought I could contribute significantly in developing this specialty in Nepal. I expressed this feeling during the interview to Prof. P.S. Chari who was then the head of department of plastic surgery at PGIMER, Chandigarh. Prof. Chari was kind enough to grant me a seat for the course that was commencing on 1st of July 1995. The department had

enough opportunity to assess me when I was posted in the department during my MS general surgery postings. Even though I was a sponsored foreign candidate, the very fact that I did my MS general surgery from the same institute made me more of an internal candidate.

The residency in plastic surgery was quite rigorous and demanding. No matter how much it was demanding I did not look back but concentrated on my work and study. I considered myself very lucky and fortunate to have been able to get a seat in plastic surgery in such a prestigious institution. As it is well said 'time flies' and it literally flew and the final day of exam arrived. Exams went well and the result was declared immediately. My happiness had no limits in passing with flying colors in the first attempt. My wife who was waiting outside the exam hall was overjoyed. I immediately called my parents in Kathmandu and conveyed the good news. They were quite elated on the achievements of their son who got the honors of being the first person in Nepal to acquire a MCh degree in plastic surgery.

I could not return to Nepal after completing the plastic surgery residency. I had to wait for six more months before my wife could complete her MD Radiology from the same institute. In the mean time I got a job of registrar at the newly established Chandigarh Medical College where I was doing general surgery as well as plastic surgery and burns. This job was a welcome financial relief for both of us. Once my wife completed her MD Radiology residency in December 1997 we decided to come back to work in Nepal. After completing all formalities at the institute we finally landed in Kathmandu in 1998 early February.

Radiologists were needed desperately at the TU Teaching Hospital so my wife could get a job quite easily at least on session basis whereas I had to start doing voluntary in the department of surgery which carried on for two months. Finally I was given the job of a teaching assistant in the department of surgery with a condition that all burns will have to be managed by me. I readily agreed to this and started working. It took me sometime to settle down and gather momentum. I was alone in the unit and being a very junior faculty some other senior faculty was incharge of the unit. I was asked to be on emergency duty and carry out emergency operations. My experience while working in the medical college was of great help. I did couple of surgeries but finally put my hand up and said I will do only plastic surgery. I was very reluctantly taken off the duty roster by the head of department of surgery.

It was only after two long years of teaching assistantship that

advertisement was made for the post of assistant professor from the service commission. One hurdle of getting in the department was over. It was time that I had to prove myself. After a lot of cajoling and coaxing the department finally agreed to allow me to do surgeries by providing one operating day a week. I was able to start regular outpatient for plastic surgery patients which was twice a week. It was like running a one man show. I was doing all the admissions, discharge, making OT lists, surgeries, dressings and the emergencies related to plastic surgery. I must thank Prof. M. Khakurel, Prof. G.P. Sharma and Prof. B. R. Joshi for their constant support and encouragement in establishing a good plastic surgery service at the teaching hospital. Dr. Rai after completing his fellowship joined the unit and both of us joined hand to take plastic surgery to greater heights. We did the first ever finger replant in 1999 during the dashain festival. Another plastic surgeon Dr. Basant Mathema also joined the department and the unit was taking good shape. I was involved with an organization called KFK (Karing for Kids) with Dr. Libby Wilson who was frequently visiting Nepal to operate on kids with cleft lip and palate. Our working field was Nepalgunj where we would operate upon 75 kids with cleft lip and palate in one week. I am grateful to her for teaching me the nuances of cleft surgery.

Early in the year 2001, I was awarded the fellowship to spend some time in the United States through the Plastic Surgery Education Foundation. I spent time with Prof. Randy Sherman at the University of Southern California, Plastic Surgery Unit at Los Angeles, the hub for plastic surgery and with Prof. Bryant Toth at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco. I really cherish the time I spent there as I was exposed to the world of practical aspect of cosmetic surgery which I lacked during my residency in PGI. In 2003 I received another fellowship from the Scottish Foundation of Nepal to visit Scotland for 6 weeks. I was with Prof. David Souter who is a renowned personality in microsurgery. I was able to observe quite a lot of microsurgical procedures there which helped in my future career.

By the time I came back Prof. Rai had already resigned and left the institute. We could not hold back Dr. Mathema also. Dr. Jayan Man Shrestha joined the unit after completing his MS General Surgery from the institute. It was from then the unit slowly picked up pace and has been running well. The first ever hand replant in Nepal was done at our hospital in 2002. Since then we have been performing such operations successfully. First ever bilateral hand replant was done in 2006 and a similar case was done just recently. Dr. Jayan joined the FCPS plastic surgery course and did two years

of fellowship in hand and microsurgery and plastic surgery from Singapore. Two of us have toiled hard to establish the unit and take it to greater heights. In 2010, first time in Nepal, we started the MCh program in plastic surgery. Dr. Budhi Nath Adhikari graduated with flying colors and is serving the people in Chitwan Medical College. He is the first Nepali to acquire a MCh degree in plastic surgery from the country. Dr. Sangam Rayamajhi is our second resident who qualified and is working in the unit after graduating. Three more residents have joined the unit for their training. The unit was upgraded to a fully established department two years ago. The department is working on all cylinders to serve the needy people of the country. The services it is providing are:

- Reconstructive surgeries, microsurgery, skin grafting
- Aesthetic Surgery- blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty, facelift, browlift, breast augmentation and reduction, abdominoplasty and liposuction.
- Cleft and craniofacial surgeries
- Acute burn management and burn surgeries
- Surgery for lymphedema,
- Brachial plexus surgery
- The department is quite well known in the country and we are getting referrals from all over Nepal. It gives us a sense of satisfaction when we see our developments and when we travel down the memory lane.