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Gallery | Kevin Bubriski

Ever since I arrived in Nepal in 1975 as a Peace Corps volunteer, I have been taking photographs of the country and its people. In the 1980s, I traveled across Nepal by foot with a tripod-mounted camera. The photographs I took during this period captured village and farm life continuing much as it had for centuries. Nepal has since been transformed by three decades of infusion from foreign development aid; remittances from the millions of Nepalis living abroad in South Asia, the Middle East, and beyond; new motor roads built into the mountains; the 1996-2006 civil war; decades of political instability; and finally, the devastating earthquakes of Spring 2015.

As soon as I heard the news of Nepal's first major earthquake on April 25, 2015, I knew I had to get back there as soon as possible. I have lived and traveled throughout the country, including in three of the districts devastated by the quakes. In the wake of this natural disaster, deeply saddened and dismayed, I needed to continue documenting Nepali life.

On May 12, the day after I purchased my ticket to Kathmandu, a second earthquake hit, this one centered further east, bringing more aftershocks and anxiety. Two weeks later, I boarded the plane from Doha to Kathmandu. Aside from a handful of international relief workers, migrant Nepali workers on their annual trip home from their work as construction workers and domestic and service workers in Qatar filled the plane. A sense of nervous anticipation pervaded the journey. The Nepali passengers were returning to a transformed country, and many of them would find their villages shaken to rubble. As we descended through heavy, cloud-filled turbulence, passengers grasped their seat arms tightly.

Nothing appeared unusual as we approached the runway. Newly constructed concrete buildings stood. Traffic filled the roads. But soon enough, I could see dozens of large pallets piled high

with relief supplies under thick nylon straps. The ride from the airport to Patan seemed normal, too, until we got into the old city. Flimsy wooden splints and buttresses held up old brick house and temple walls, on the edge of crumbling.

Nearly 9,000 Nepalis were killed in the earthquakes. Hundreds of thousands were displaced. Through June and July of 2015, I watched the seasons transition in Nepal, from the blasting sun of the pre-monsoon weeks to the hard rains that come without fail at night and, without warning, during the day. And yet, even then, there were signs of recovery. Schools began to reopen. Groups of young men and women came to Kathmandu and other localities to work, breaking down damaged buildings for the equivalent of seven to ten dollars a day.

The slow work of reconstruction and rebuilding continues. Now, more than two years later, some people are still living in temporary shelters and many continue to suffer the long-term effects of these natural disasters and their human-made consequences. Nepal still needs financial assistance, and visitors, tourists, and trekkers are very welcome. Nepal remains an emerging constituent democracy. Monuments and houses may have been lost, but the country is rebuilding and there is much to learn by experiencing the enduring generosity, resilience, and beauty of the human spirit that continues to thrive.

I brought with me both a Canon 5D digital single lens reflex camera with which I made high resolution color photographs, and an iPhone with which I made square black and white photographs. Even with the iPhone, which almost fit into the palm of my hand, I framed images carefully with the intention of creating strong compositions. Both the color and black and white images are distilled abstractions and representations of the actual lived experience that Nepal and the Nepali people endured through the aftermath of the earthquakes.

Kevin Bubriski is Associate Professor of Photography at Green Mountain College in Poultney, Vermont (USA) where he has taught since 2010. He has been photographing Nepal for forty-two years, since arriving there in 1975 as an American Peace Corps volunteer. His retrospective monograph, *Nepal 1975-2011*, was published by Harvard University's Peabody Museum Press in 2014. Bubriski's fine art photographs are in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris. During the 2016-2017 academic year, he had a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship in Nepal where he continued his documentary and fine art photography in Nepal's Karnali Zone.



Demolition of concrete buildings continued through monsoon season downpours. Balaju, Kathmandu, Nepal.



In a neighborhood on the east side of Bhaktapur, interior walls of family houses were exposed by the collapse of roofs and neighboring buildings.



By mid-June 2015 there was little left of the Karma Raja Maha Vihara monastery on the Swayambunath hill, west of downtown Kathmandu. The monastery was badly cracked and was taken down under the supervision of UNESCO and the Karmapa ShaMarNag Committee.



In the Chyusal neighborhood of Patan, Buddhist stone shrines, called *caitya*, and prayer wheels were damaged by falling brick and debris from the surrounding houses. This section of old Patan was damaged more severely than other neighborhoods.



The fourth-floor stairway of a building under demolition is covered in rubble. Such stairways became internal chutes for rubble to be brought down to ground level. Workers made holes by pick axing and hammering through concrete and rebar floors in order to let rubble fall down to the lower levels. This way, the demolition laborers did not have to carry heavy loads of debris down the stairs.



A newlywed woman in Bungamati cleared the debris of what was her house. She and her husband were too shy to let me know their names. They lost everything except the footprint of where their house once stood. They cleared away most of the debris and needed to make a safe and secure temporary shelter as they prepared for the birth of their first child. While they had so little, they had each other, their health, and the birth to look forward to.

Near the Gongabu bus park, neighborhood women looked up at demolition crews working above. Numerous high rise concrete buildings were severely shaken in the Gongobu area where many of the tall concrete structures were built without adequate foundations or rebar reinforcement.





Anisha Shrestha was seven years old and studied in the 2nd grade when I took this picture. She and her brother, Ganesh, walked through the ruins in Charikot twice a day to get between their home and school.



At mid-morning, laborers in Kathmandu's Naya Bazaar take a break from their heavy work tearing down buildings. These four young men came to Kathmandu looking for work after the earthquakes. They lived in the building that they were tearing down with eight other friends from villages in the southeastern Udayapur district. These workers, numbering in the several thousands across Kathmandu and other affected areas, were paid by the owners of the properties that they deconstructed.



Bhaktapur city lost an immense number of its older brick and wood houses and temples. While some parts of the city were left standing, other neighborhoods were destroyed entirely.

Two young women walk by numerous large buildings that were severely damaged and due for demolition in Chautara, the district headquarters of Sindhupalchok district.



The foundation stone and brickwork were all that remained of the 17th century Trailokya Mohan Narayan Temple in Kathmandu's Durbar Square, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Large piles of splintered structural and ornamental wood were pushed up against the temple foundations. The "Tour Lane" signs guide residents and visitors away from dangerous, unstable structures.



On a Saturday in early July 2015, Sagar Thapa, 15, was sporting his brand-new t-shirt, which expressed the optimism of Nepal's youth. The younger generation was energized after the disasters and had taken the lead in getting relief supplies to the remote districts of Nepal.



Ram Maya Lamani and Dhana Kumari Bharati had lived at the international relief camp in Chautara Bazaar, the district center of Sindhupalchok, since the April 25th earthquake.

Between monsoon showers in July 2015, bright sunshine illuminated the devastation that covered the town of Sankhu, east of the Kathmandu Valley. The earthquake leveled several acres of the downtown area.





Members of the Nepal Army assisted in the demolition of unsafe shops and houses on top of the Swayambunath hill. The ancient stupa, or shrine, in the background, suffered no major damage.