

# Friends of Taktse *UPDATE*

Taktse International School  
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Sikkim, India 737101  
[www.taktse.org](http://www.taktse.org)

## September 2019

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With over 20 speakers and 59 sessions, Taktse hosted students from 15 other schools at Bookaroo Gangtok in June. Click [HERE](#) to see a video about this major event.



### Bookaroo comes to Taktse

by Ms. Reshma Thapa, Head of Humanities K-8

It all started in 2008 when Mrs. Denjongpa, Ms. Yolmo and I took a small group of students to Delhi to attend a children's literature festival that none of us had heard of before. From the mountains all the way down to the plains we traveled, unsure of what to expect, but with open minds to make the best of what was to come. The festival had a strange, but catchy name: Bookaroo. It

was the first children's literature festival in India. Its goal was to stir imaginations and connect children everywhere with the joy of reading.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of organizers Swati, Venkatesh and Jo and the inspiration provided by dozens of authors, illustrators and storytellers from around the world, we did not regret making the long journey to Delhi. Since that first trip, Bookaroo has become an annual pilgrimage for Taktse teachers and students, the connection strengthening with each successive visit. Our students have returned every year from Bookaroo more confident in their ability to ask questions, converse with adults, and speak in public. Our teachers have returned inspired to write their own children's books. We all wanted to bring the Bookaroo experience to more children in Sikkim who could not make the journey to Delhi.



So when Swati and Venkatesh offered to stage Bookaroo at Taktse – a dream we had nurtured for years – we jumped at the opportunity. Bookaroo Gangtok debuted on June 28 and 29. It featured 21 speakers and 59 sessions including storytelling, drama, workshops, arts and crafts. Children aged four to fourteen from 15 private and government schools in Gangtok filled Taktse's classrooms, eager but nervous. It reminded me of our first Bookaroo in Delhi.

From Bandana Tulachan's story of a little girl in Nepal, to Chador Wangmo's Bhutanese tales of the Yeti, to Deepak Dalal's tales of tigers and snow leopards, the children's imaginations took

flight, all while crafting their own super heroes, creating secret codes and messages, doodling on walls and singing songs.

Interacting with authors, illustrators and storytellers was a new experience for many of the students. By the end of each session, students who had started out too shy to raise a hand or ask a question found their voices. For some, this was their first time sharing a story of their own with an audience. My most cherished memory is that of a quiet 3<sup>rd</sup> grader who shared her experience of losing a wiggly tooth, blushing and trembling all the while.

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Thank you Mr. Namgyal, and to all who contributed to this newsletter!

Talking to  
**taktse**  
parents



Click [HERE](#) to hear what parents have to say about the school their children attend.

## Bookaroo (continued)

At Taktse, interacting with real authors, asking questions, and sharing thoughts and opinions freely is a privilege we sometimes take for granted. Watching students from other schools experience this at Bookaroo made us realize how fortunate we are. Seeing this growth and the many lives that Bookaroo touched, I am thankful to Swati, Venkatesh and Mr. Denjongpa, for bringing Bookaroo to Taktse.

As I watched the last of the students trickle out of the lobby with autographed books in their arms and big grins on their faces, I told myself that the festival has to return. I will keep my fingers crossed for another year of Bookaroo in Gangtok.



### **Our New Academic Head**

*by Sonam P. Denjongpa, Director  
On behalf of the Board of Directors,  
I am pleased to announce the  
appointment of Ann Lindsey as  
Taktse's new academic head. Ann*

*has worked in international schools around the world, experiencing many cultures and approaches to education. She grew up in a farming family in Minnesota, loves gardening, and gets excited about introducing students to the art of growing things.*

*We feel lucky to have found an academic head who understands progressive education, appreciates cultural diversity and the natural environment, and can implement Taktse's mission to prepare students for the future they will shape and inhabit.*

## Classical Guitar at Taktse!

Sixth grader Rianna Pradhan performed Romance de Amor and Fur Elise on her classical guitar for her classmates and teacher. Click [HERE](#) to hear her performance.



## Meet Ann Lindsey, Taktse's New Academic Head of School

I am honored to introduce myself as the Academic Head of School after joining Taktse on June 1. I began my teaching career in Minnesota in 1993, working with middle school students as an English and math teacher. In 2003, my career shifted to coordination of large initiatives and programs – International Baccalaureate, STEM, and Gifted & Talented. I moved into international educational leadership in 2010, accepting posts at turn-around schools in Dubai and Istanbul, as well as working with schools in Kolkata and Sweden during a sabbatical focusing on student activism and advocacy.



No matter where I call home, my educational goals remain the same:

- Respecting the school culture, climate and ethos while contributing input from an international perspective
- Improving student learning and achievement by identifying areas of concern and implementing school improvement/action plans as part of the school community team
- Providing insight and oversight to ensure the optimum delivery of the adopted curricula, focusing on best practices, inquiry and learner engagement
- Coordinating, developing and delivering professional development to support learning across all disciplines and grade levels

My philosophy of education grew out my undergraduate studies at the University of Minnesota and my post-graduate work in curriculum integration, but they were also influenced by raising two children – a daughter who was successful from kindergarten onward, and a son who struggled academically at times. I'm proud to report that both became wonderful adults with the older becoming the third generation of educators in our family and the younger choosing finance as a career.

I can be reached at [ann.lindsey@taktse.org](mailto:ann.lindsey@taktse.org). My actual and virtual office "doors" are always open to learn more about how I can best support the Taktse educational community!



Kyra Morris teaches Humanities, Writing, and French at the Waring School in Beverly, MA. She came to Taktse this summer to work with English teachers, especially Ms. Bhawna and Ms. Anusha, who teach literature in grades 9 and 10. She just finished her third year of teaching at Waring this spring, but she will be starting a PhD program in English at Princeton University this fall.



## Pressing an Ear against Taktse's Hive

by Kyra Morris

What does it mean to “drop a mouse into a poem/and watch him probe his way out”? I asked. At first, the Grade 10 students met my question about a line from Billy Collins with blank stares. I waited, letting them wrestle with the uncomfortable silence. “It means to explore, Ms.,” one finally responded. “It means to find your way,” another chimed in.

For the past four weeks I have been asking Grade 9 and 10 students to drop into poems and see what they find. In “Introduction to Poetry,” Billy Collins warns against the tendency to “tie the poem to a chair with rope/and torture a confession out of it.” Instead, he suggests that we—readers of poetry—“press an ear against [the poem’s] hive,” or “walk inside the poem’s room/and feel the walls for a light switch.”

Listening. Feeling. Collins reminds us that we can’t *understand* a poem without first responding to it. Following Collins’ admonition, I asked Grade 9 students to illustrate metaphors from the famous balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. I asked Grade 10 students to cover their poems with questions. Unless we allow ourselves to respond to a poem—to feel, hear, see—we treat the poem as a problem to solve, rather than a work of art to appreciate.

On my last day with the Grade 10 students, I walked into the classroom and sat down at a desk. The students filed in and formed a circle on the floor, their books open to Elizabeth Jennings’s “In Praise of Creation.” I said nothing. “Let’s share our questions,” one student suggested. The class began. After each student had shared an interpretive question, they broke into small groups to discuss, then came back together at the end. Watching from the distance of my desk, I heard them probe, listen, feel. I inserted myself only when five minutes remained and asked them to reflect on how the discussion had gone. I closed by congratulating them.

Though I was watching the discussion on that particular day, Taktse has asked of me what I asked of those students. It has asked me to listen—to students, to teachers. It has asked me to feel around for the rhythm of a Taktse day—assembly, morning tea, post-lunch walk up the hill, afternoon tea, clubs block. It has asked me to notice the many kinds of mist that can shroud the school, and the varieties of dal served at lunch. And it has made me ask questions: How can we encourage Taktse students to be independent thinkers? And what is it about this community that makes me so reticent to leave?

I think the two questions answer each other. The moments when I saw students take the lead—Grade 10 students leading their own discussion; a kindergarten student speaking extemporaneously at assembly; Taktse Girls’ Basketball

practicing even before their official game on Saturday afternoon—were the moments that defined Taktse for me and made me want to stay longer at this school in the mountains.

Thank you, Taktse, for giving me the opportunity to press an ear against your hive.





## Taktse Calendars: the Long and Winding Road

by Phuntsog Namgyal

November spells anxiety for me because it's the month that the Taktse calendars and annual appeal letters are expected to arrive at the homes of our supporters all over the world. Having worked on the project for over four months, I fret over questions like: What if the calendars don't arrive in time? Will our supporters like them? Were the last four months of work by the calendar team worth the effort? When I think of those questions, I get very anxious. My fitbit is a testament to that.

The calendar project begins in July with Mr. Yawan, Mr. Karma and me taking pictures over many weeks, while praying to our deities for bright weather. We then write to our dear friends Susan Schwarzwald and Jeremy Polk to seek their help with photo selection and editing, and layout designs for the calendar.

Once August arrives, we get price quotes from three printing companies in Siliguri. Once we choose a printer, a hardcopy proof is prepared and approved. We still follow this old-school system, where a hardcopy proof is carried back and forth between departments and to the homes of signatories for approval and authorization of funds. We understand the need for this rigorous system, even though it is cumbersome.

By mid-August, our academic head Ann Lindsey and our director Sonam Denjongpa start to work on multiple drafts of the Annual Appeal letter. Lonnie Friedman and Paul Lauenstein add the photos and graphic design.

In the past, we would mail our calendars from Sikkim itself, but sadly our post office in Gangtok is not properly equipped to handle bulk mailings. The calendars would take up to five months to reach their destinations, sometimes arriving at our donors' homes as late as April.

To solve this problem, Sonam Denjongpa and I met with the Gangtok postmaster to ask him how to make sure that the calendars would arrive on time. He suggested mailing them from the Kolkata Foreign Post Office, and provided us with the names of postal officials there.

In September, after picking up all the printed calendars from the printer, we shut down the administration office for half a day to stuff the six hundred calendars and annual appeal letters into large envelopes, making sure that "John" doesn't receive the calendar with the letter addressed to "Jack." We complete this laborious task by

early October. Then Mr. Dibyan and Mr. Rinchen drive down to Siliguri with the sacks of calendar packages in our pickup truck, and catch the overnight train to Kolkata, haggling with porters to get the best rate to carry the sacks of calendars to their compartment on the train.

Once in Kolkata, they spend hours standing in long queues at the Foreign Post Office buying the stamps and then licking and affixing them to the envelopes. Then they watch for an entire day to oversee batches of calendar packages moving out in small burlap bags.

Their last step in Kolkata is showing

gratitude to the people working at the Foreign Post Office by offering them khadas and Sikkimese tea. Once that is done, they take the overnight train back to Siliguri, and then drive the long, winding mountain road back to Taktse.

We are now in September, which means we are in the midst of producing and mailing the calendar packages to our donors. Please think of us as November approaches. Please smile at my sleepless nights and shoot me an email at [phuntsog.namgyal@taktse.org](mailto:phuntsog.namgyal@taktse.org) when your Taktse calendar arrives from halfway around the world.





# Ms. Prerna's 5th grade English class learns discursive writing

## P.E. Every Day

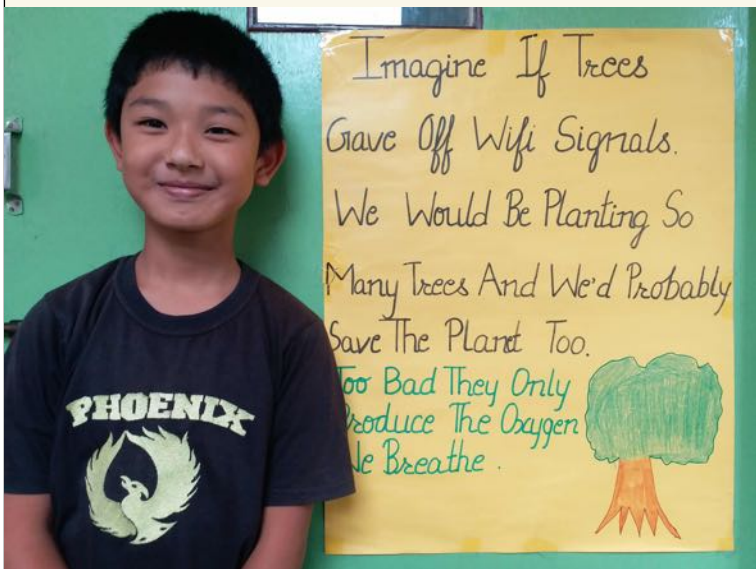
by Kelden Rigsang

Do you know what P.E. is? It stands for Physical Education. It is the time when students play all kinds of sports, such as football, rugby, cricket, and basketball. It is an educational course related to maintaining the human body through exercises. Having P.E. every day can be excellent or miserable, but in my opinion, having P.E. every day is excellent since it makes our muscles grow stronger.

I joined a new school in 2016. I was shocked when I found out that they have P.E. every day. I thought it would be a bad experience for me since I was a fragile kid with weak muscles. The next day I went to school filled with regret about joining the school. But after a few days, I started liking it. I also was no longer a weak kid because my muscles were getting stronger. Hence, having P.E. every day is beneficial for our health.

On the other hand, having P.E. every day may lead to unhappiness as some people may not like it. They may be more interested in reading or drawing or writing. They may feel like P.E. class is a drag.

In conclusion, P.E. has its benefits. Many members in my family have joined a gym to maintain their health. When I grow up, I will be fit and healthy because of the daily P.E. classes. Therefore, having P.E. is important, as I believe health is wealth.



## New Books in the Library

by Namgyal Tseten Lepcha

Books are a source of knowledge. People read different types of books. Some books make you laugh or cry, some give you information, some make you think, and some you can relate to your own life. Every book gives you something.

If the library gets new books, students will read more, so we need new books often. In 2012, all the books in our classroom library were old. No one would read them. The

books were not even touched.

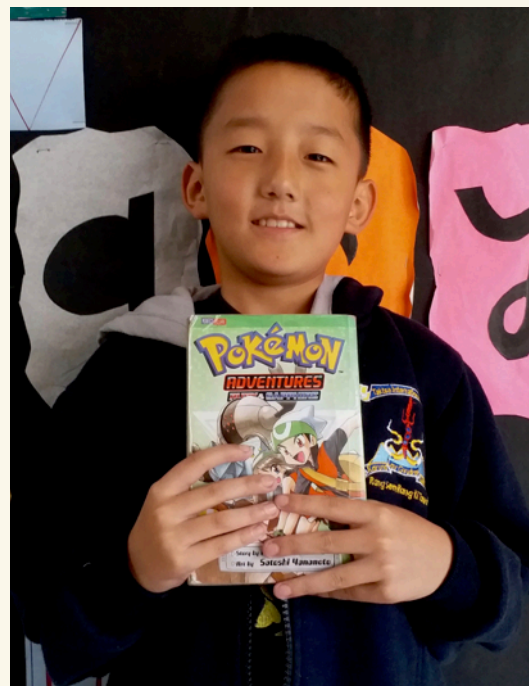
They were dirty and had torn pages. One book only had its cover! But one day, our teacher brought new books.

After that, students started reading more and more.

Kelden started reading Fly Guy, Zamyang

was reading Matilda, Norbu

was reading Big Note, Nuingzum was reading How to Be a Great Footballer. Having new books is really important.



On the other hand, some people might say that getting new books is a waste of money. Sometimes books get lost from classroom libraries, and students don't always take care of them the way they should.

However, to sum it up, books are a source of knowledge and wisdom. Having new books in the classroom library motivates students to read more books. I believe that my teacher gets new books because she wants her students to do great in their futures.

*Jamyang Tamang attended Taktse on a scholarship made possible by generous donors. He is currently working toward a bachelor's degree in computer science at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts.*



## Full Circle

*by Phuntsog Namgyal*

One of the revelations I experienced over the past decade at Taktse is that education is a long term process, like an anthology of stories collected over the course of time. Reaping the fruits of one's labor takes time and patience. After many years at Taktse, I am seeing the fruits of my labor.

I have seen students listen to their first read aloud of The Very Hungry Caterpillar, imagine brandishing swords on horseback to conquer dragons in misty mountains, gulp cups of health drinks during recess, wolf down sacks of potatoes over the years, celebrate after winning their first point for their team, receive rewards after writing their first persuasive letter, while enjoying every bit of their learning journey with their classmates. Students whom I once could hold in my arms have now grown into young adults lighting up our tiny state of Sikkim and the outside world.



My first image of Jamyang Tamang was a plump Himalayan kid brimming with energy. I saw immediately that he was blessed with a charming smile and a warm heart. He was always glued to the shelves of the library, immersing himself in the adventures of Skull Duggery and books by Anthony Horowitz, somebody who loved reciting humorous lines from The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. He could also be spotted dodging around the four squares area holding a tattered ball as he fought for the top spot among his friends. Middle school brought a different set of adventures. One could see Jamyang dressed in a toga as he enacted a scene from Julius Caesar during morning assembly, or conquer his fear as he rappelled down a cliff during the Educorp Adventure Retreat. As he entered high school, the task of choosing the right subjects seemed unending. I remember him telling me about his inspiration from the movie 'The Wolf of Wall Street' and how choosing commerce would earn him a good living—yet he chose

science over business. His journey through the rigorous AS and A Level Cambridge exams to majoring in computer science at Endicott College has transformed him into a thoughtful, reflective individual who has surpassed my expectations.

Jamyang sent me an email asking if he could intern at Taktse this summer. His proposal was simply brilliant. He concisely articulated clear objectives and his passion to share his learning on computers with the students. Reading his proposal brought joy to my heart and made me feel like we did something remarkable with him and all the other students who have graduated from Taktse.

Jamyang's summer internship at Taktse involved coding programs with our computer science teacher, designing a website for this year's Taktse Collage, counseling and sharing his stories from Endicott College with his juniors, playing basketball during recess, and sharing new programs with students who love technology. He would often sit beside me, asking about the true meaning of life and beyond. I greatly enjoyed having him back at Taktse and so did the rest of our community. It feels like coming around in a full circle.

Education is indeed a long-term investment that pays dividends for a lifetime.





*Dechen Tamang from Grade 8 was one of the students selected for United World College's International School of Asia, Karuizawa (UWC ISAK), summer school program in Japan.*



## **ISAK 2019**

*by Dechen Tamang*

It was a hot summer afternoon when I arrived at Narita airport in Japan. It had been only a month since I'd received my acceptance email to UWC ISAK Summer School. From the moment I stepped into the small waiting lounge, bustling with movement and a cacophony of sounds ringing in the air, I knew this trip was going to be different.

We reached the campus late in the evening. The process of submitting our valuables and sending emails to our parents about our safe arrival had rushed by, as had the first and second days in a jet lag-induced blur.

Our classes started on the third day. That was when I really began exploring new ideas. Our classes lasted an hour and a half and extended from the third day to the fifth. The classes – Design Thinking (DT), Mindful Leadership By Design (MLBD) and Culture In Diversity (CID) enabled me to see things in an entirely different light. It took me a while to adjust to the new lens through which I viewed the world but it was well worth it in the end.

At ISAK, we were given time to spend with friends or by ourselves, be it talking in the Cloud Cave, doodling in the Canvas Studio, or walking around the beautiful campus, crunching fallen leaves under our feet. We had a Culture Fair, a Talent Show, a hike to two gorgeous waterfalls and an exciting Dragon Festival.

From the sixth to the tenth days, we formed groups and created a project to bring about change. In my group, we created a turtle completely out of plastic and trash we'd found in dustbins to show how littering and plastic waste affect marine life. On the eleventh and twelfth days, we showcased our projects. Needless to say, each group had gone through an eye-opening process and was proud of what they had created.

While my experience at ISAK was highly educational, it was also filled with a lot of fun, laughter and new friendships. I had fun nights when our dorm counsellors arranged music, movie nights and sleep-overs in our dorm unit. And it goes without saying, my advisory was like a second family to me, with whom I could share whatever I wanted without the fear of being judged. When the time came to leave, I was very sad to say goodbye to my new friends.

ISAK Summer School changed not only me but a lot of people in various ways; intellectually, emotionally and physically. It took my previous self and gave me an upgrade. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I was lucky to be able to grab ahold of it. All I can do to show my gratitude for what I experienced is to say thank you.



*Donations to Taktse can be made at: <https://www.taktseeschool.org>. The Friends of Taktse UPDATE newsletter is edited by Lonnie Friedman & Paul Lauenstein. To subscribe or add a friend, email Lonnie Friedman at: [lonnie.friedman@comcast.net](mailto:lonnie.friedman@comcast.net).*

*Late in my adult life, I earned my Master's degree in Education and started a new career teaching students who struggle in literacy and other academic areas. I've enjoyed being an Academic Support Coordinator at independent and international schools. Berwick Academy in South Berwick, Maine has been my home for the past few years. When I became aware of Berwick's association with Taktse International School, I applied to visit Taktse as a resource person because I'd never been to India before and I wondered what it was like. A few of my colleagues at Berwick Academy had visited Taktse. After hearing their stories and seeing their pictures, I wanted to experience Taktse for myself. Since my own children are grown and out of the nest, it seemed like the perfect time in my life for an educational adventure.*



## **A Transformative Teaching Experience**

*by Marti Limbocker*

The road to Gangtok is unforgettable. The driver maneuvers along narrow switchback mountain roads with no guardrails, squeezing past large trucks coming at us. Oxen pull wooden carts and farmers harvest wheat in terraced fields. Strings of multicolored prayer flags flapping in the breeze crisscross waterfalls. Ornate Buddhist and Hindu temples evoke a sense of peace and serenity, belying the dangers of the mountain road.

Gangtok is a multi-sensory experience. The fresh, clean air is redolent with sandalwood incense, garlic, and fresh rain. Himalayan peaks are wreathed in fluffy white clouds and the mountainsides are dotted with green, pink and blue cement houses. Women dress in fuchsias and bright white and saffron kurtas, with long, sparkling silver earrings and multicolored silk scarves casually flung over their shoulders. Fragrant rice served with lentils and spicy fiddleheads are the mainstay meals this season.

Taktse International School is a multi-sensory experience in a different way. Approaching the school, a majestic, curved, green and white building comes into view, nestled in the mountainside. Children of all ages, some wearing blue sweat pants and Taktse t-shirts and others in formal navy blue suits and ties or pleated skirts and dress shirts, run around the schoolyard, playing tag and flirting like children everywhere.

Unlike children I have encountered elsewhere, Taktse students sit obediently in class and pay attention to their teachers. At recess, they take tea with the adults. And they speak English very well. Despite being a diverse mix of Sikkimese, Nepali, Bhutanese, and Tibetan tribes and castes, each with its own language and culture, they meld together comfortably and happily, creating a magical learning experience in the clouds.

My initial purpose at Taktse was to assist in the Lower School with literacy and special needs, which I did. Soon after I started, however, several teachers from all three divisions asked for my help in better understanding and addressing the individual needs of their more challenging students. Differentiated instruction was a new concept for the Taktse teachers, but they eagerly embraced it to improve their approaches to teaching their more challenging students.

The importance of exaggeration was another concept I stressed to Taktse teachers. All teachers are actors to some extent. Research shows that memories are made and retained when a child has an emotional reaction to an event, and nowhere is it more important to create emotion and memory than in teaching.

Lastly, we discussed the importance of understanding children. If a child misbehaves, there's a reason for it. Children are inherently good, kind and eager to learn. If there's a problem, such as too many washroom breaks, or daydreaming, the child is indirectly telling the teacher that he or she needs something. I discussed what these "somethings" might be with the Taktse teachers, and how to provide them when needed.

Joining the Taktse faculty for five weeks has been a transformative experience for me. I thank the Taktse Board members for allowing me this opportunity to learn, share and grow with the wonderful teachers and students. I also thank the Taktse parents for the opportunity to interact with your dear children. And thank you, Taktse teachers, for welcoming me into your classrooms. You are resourceful, resilient, and kind. I have grown to love you and appreciate you so much. Let's keep the conversation going!





# Ngawang Choden Lachungpa's Valedictory

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, respected director, board members, family, friends, teachers, juniors and seniors, and to everyone present here today. As I speak into this microphone, I feel the heaviness of my voice. I'm a bit too aware that I am being heard, word by word.

Graduation is grandeur isn't it? Grand dresses, grand stages, grand speeches. So I guess it is only natural that I feel the pressure to sound important, to make sense, to sound smart. But today, I think I'd like to be a bit different from the Ngawang people usually see. Instead of seeing me as an academician, could you do me a favour and just see me as a 19-year-old human being?

Now, this girl named Ngawang grew up in a very isolated town of Sikkim, Chungthang. While her friends played hide and seek, she would look up at the clouds and mould shapes out of them. When she fell down, she didn't cry like other children, she apologised to her mother for hurting herself. She was a rather distant child. But then one day, her parents decided that Ngawang needed a better environment, one that would let her be a child, let her fearlessly ask teachers questions, one that would allow her to be unapologetic.

Flashing forward to today, I can now proudly call myself a Taktse product. I ask too many questions, am a bit too unapologetic, and sometimes a bit too fearless. During my 10 years at Taktse, I have found a writer in me, an economist, a leader, a teacher, a performer. But guess what I've also found in myself? I have found a 19-year-old girl who has failed tests, been rejected from many opportunities, and has had to fight through life-threatening circumstances. Despite all the hardships, I have found a warrior in me; I have found a human being in me. And that is the part that people usually don't show, in social media, or videos, or conversations. We hide so much of our humanness, and then we wonder why we can't connect to other people.

I read somewhere that there's a term called "human-value," which measures how productive you are. The term indicates that your "value" depends on how much you work. If you don't work, you might as well be called worthless. They say that in 50 years, depression will be the most common disease amongst humanity. It really isn't surprising, considering how dehumanizing the 21<sup>st</sup> century world has become.

I don't know what will help, and if anything will help. But perhaps we should stop seeing each other as achievers, students, competitors, workers; maybe we should start seeing each other as human beings. Guys, we were not born with stethoscopes, degree certificates, pens, documents. We were born with beating hearts. We were not destined to be something, we were born to live. When we compare ourselves to all these achievers in TV, all the A's they've scored, and awards they've won, I wonder if we question if they could spend time with their friends in their free time like we did.

I wonder if they were even allowed to make mistakes like we could. I wonder if they got second chances. Thus, today I want my juniors to stop torturing themselves and comparing themselves to these people that have forgotten how to live. Instead let us thank all the people who have seen us for the people we are, and not our "human-value." I know I want to.

I was lucky enough to be surrounded with people who have embraced this flawed Ngawang for who she is. They are the ones that have stayed with me even when I wasn't Ngawang the workaholic, even when I was fragile and mean and bitter about everyone, they held my hands... even when I refused to. Amala and Appala, we have moved so many mountains haven't we? We've fought so many dragons. You guys have lifted me up but made sure I didn't soar too close to the sun.

The fact that I am on stage speaking about this, is a result of our teamwork. Today is just really a celebration of all the people that have believed in us. To all of my class teachers that have tolerated us till now: Miss Sandhya, Miss Triveni, Ms. Guruama, Ms. Shradha, Ms. Yolmo, Mr. Gyan. They say that out of 10 people, 4 will want to listen to you and out of 4 only 1 will understand you. I was lucky in that way for having numerous teachers who have selflessly tried understanding us, taken our concerns as their own, and seen us beyond students; as human beings. Thank you for all the second, third and fourth chances. It is not every day that you get to hear your teachers say "we will always be by your side." It's

not every day you get to call your teachers in the middle of the day and ask them about a math problem you couldn't solve. Thank you for being someone I didn't have to fear.

And to all of my friends who are graduating with me, some of whom are not present: Metok, Kitsho, Ishali, Tenzing, Jatsho, Ariel, Yonten, Adhsiwar, Norzin, Jimba, Tempa, Arman and Jamyang. We are now adults. Isn't that so weird? We watched each other grow from

angsty, pubescent middle-schoolers, singing Taylor Swift songs or Eminem raps to adults making decisions about what we want to pursue in life. Through all of the fights, breakups, tears, and hardships, we actually crossed the finish line. And I wouldn't have chosen anyone else to grow up with.

A huge thank you to the organising committee for giving us a platform to celebrate our journey at Taktse, and to you for being present and listening to me. I hope you pat yourselves on your shoulders sometimes and tell yourselves that you did a good job, no matter what the achievement is. Because sometimes even surviving is an achievement, right?

As we take a leap of faith into the next chapter of our lives, instead of shrinking in fear because of uncertainty, I hope we never forget that although it is a brave new world, we are even braver.

I am Ngawang Choden, a dreamer ready to take flight into the real world. Now the question is: Is the world ready for me?

