

Connect Special

Editor's Desk

Dear Friends,

This edition brings to you two inspiring personalities who have taken upon themselves to realize their dreams and in the bargain benefitted the community at large. Such a learning experience for me as I compile these stories!

"To pursue your dreams, to have them come true, to have made a difference, to have changed society, to have fought against powerful forces... that's a life well-spent".

-- Hugh Hefner



Happy Reading!!

Regards,

Bhavna Botta

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Meet **Shama Noorani Choudhary**, travel expert with Enable Travel, living life to the fullest by making her dream of seeing the disabled fraternity travel far and wide.

Such an inspiring personality madam, please share a little about your childhood

I was blessed to be born to an intellectual family of architects, barristers and lawyers, which was why I, a polio patient from the age of 2 was treated the same as my able bodied siblings.

I attended a convent school one, of the few schools in Bombay which had an elevator, even though I had to be bodily carried up and down the 6 stone steps to enter and exit the building. My Mother very firmly told the head mistress and teachers to treat me like the other children, her only request was to give me 15 minutes extra to write my examination papers as my hands could tire. The teachers took my Mums words to treat me normally to heart and I was sent out of class regularly for being naughty! As for the extra time for my tests and exams, I never utilised that luxury, finishing earlier on time throughout my schooling years!



or

When and how did travel become your dream

Having been given the right foundation in my formative years I grabbed life with both hands, my never say never attitude held me in good stead. I chased my dreams of travelling, visiting Nepal, Manali, Goa, London, Paris, Milan, Pakistan, UAE, Saudi Arabia and many other places. Every destination I visited not only added to my knowledge of the place, but did a lot more.... it helped me grow as a human being, it made me appreciate nature, it helped me realise my life path, it helped me become the people's person I am today and most importantly it helped me to throw my awareness of being 'different' to the winds!

The snow capped mountains of Pokhara in Nepal opened up the spiritual aspect of me, making me feel closer to God than ever before.

So many places, fantastic, but was it easy to travel as a person with disability

Travelling alone to Goa made me realise of how capable I am of 'adapting' to any situation I was presented with, including taking a shower on my manual chair knowing fully well it would rust!

Being thrown off a flight to Paris from Rome made me realise the power I had as a disabled traveller,

when I won my case with the airline.

I was refused entry on my wheelchair into a mosque in Saudi Arabia. I stubbornly refused to go in any other way, crying my heart out, when suddenly a man appeared and ensured that I did, much to the astonishment of the officials. This incident made me realise that Angels walk the earth, and to never give up your positive beliefs. I am an Angel healer and I work closely with the Angelic realm to help other people live a happier worry free life now.



Doing a recce in Kerala

What about some memorable, life changing events

Living in the UK for 10 years looking after my young son without the domestic help I was used to all my life made me feel like a Big Achiever! I bought my first car and fulfilled my dream of driving independently, the freedom I experienced was subliminal to say the least.

My stint in the UK made me realise how much the disabled in India have to compromise due to the lack of infrastructure, the lackadaisical attitude of the government and helpless family members. Hence I jumped at the offer to work with Enable Travel, India's Premier Accessible Holiday Specialist in 2016.

Very few people get this opportunity to live their dream, congratulations, tell us about your work

My dream of helping the disabled to travel came true when I was offered to be on the panel of disabled experts for Enable Travel. We experts, 7 in all with different disabilities have done recces of 85 tourist destinations and hotels, in India and abroad, to ensure their accessibility.

A year before our launch in March 2017, Enable Travel began investing in wheelchair accessible vans, ramps, shower chairs, amphibious chairs to go swimming in a pool or the ocean, trekking chairs, ISL interpreters, trained group managers and other facilities to make travel a reality for the disabled.

My dream for the future is to see the disabled fraternity travelling, it is really sad that only a handful do....

Do reach out to me via email - shamanooranichoudhary@gmail.com and let Enable Travel know where you would like to travel, or even if your favourite destination is accessible for your disability.



On a houseboat in Kerala.

Meet **Nisha**, a humanitarian at heart and works towards making her dreams come true.

Nisha before going into details of your wonderful work tell us about you and your family.

On March 25, 1991, I (Nisha Varghese) was born in my beloved South Africa to my parents who are humble and hardworking teachers who instilled in all three of their kids the value of hard work, kindness and generosity. I went to special school for the first eight years of my schooling (because I have Cerebral Palsy) until medical issues forced me to finish my high school career at home after which I was a Social Media Manger for a while until I realized that my heart had always belonged to Humanitarianism.



Tell us about your campaign

I started my campaign for MiracleFeet because I believe that all children regardless of their socio-economic circumstance deserve to live to their fullest potential without the hindrance of clubfoot (which is entirely possible since Clubfoot is treatable in 95% of the cases).

Oh wow, such a great initiative

This is not my first foray into Humanitarianism in 2009 I attempted to raise \$1000 for UNICEF. Despite failing miserably, I learned a lot and used those lessons a few years later to raise \$7 862 for The Water Project, Inc – the money was used to build a well for a community in Kenya. Since then, I have raised money \$1 075 for the Not For Sale Campaign, \$1 088.84 for the Elton John AIDS Foundation (UK), \$5 307 for the Malala Fund, and \$10 317.04 for Smile Train (which was enough to pay for 41 cleft-repair surgeries). Initially because I was using social media to spread my message my greatest challenge was to prove to people that I was a well-intended human being trying to do good and not some kind of scammer trying to rob them.

I know the work you are doing is not an easy one ,What keeps you going in this

The thought that with God working through me I can leave the world a little better than it was when I got here keeps me going. Additionally my family inspires me and my Superhero Catherine Constantinides inspires me (she is an Environmentalist and Human Rights Activist – when she's not building new leaders or planting trees she is at the UN demanding that the Saharawi People, the people of the Western Sahara, be given their right to self-determination [my Superhero is so very special I'm so proud of her every day and I hope everyone Google's her name she is guaranteed to amaze and inspire]).

That's wonderful ,What next

My plans for the future are to keep helping as many people as possible through my philanthropy and blogging. Additionally, I hope to rebrand “disability” by living my best life and inspiring others to do the same I hope to teach the world that *different is COOL!*

Everyone can donate my 50 New Feet campaign at <https://www.crowdrise.com/50newfeet> or follow #50NewFeet on Twitter and share my tweets (my campaign ends June 17th2018). To read my personal blog everyone can visit nishav360.com.



Superhero, Environmentalist and Humanitarian
Catherine Constantinides

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