

A brave young man learns how to start all over again

Peter Bodkin

"YOU know Dee Why?" Bepin Shrestha asked, unprompted.

"The best thing about Dee Why is the very nice people."

Bepin's spontaneous, happy recollection of his time spent on the northern beaches was remarkable, given it was punctuated with such a brutal full-stop.

"Collaroy Plateau is very nice, and I love Palm Beach," the young Nepalese student continued.

Bepin is the tragic face of violent crime, with the hard-working, slightly shy but friendly student's movements now reduced to slow-motion, and his conversation abbreviated to simple three- and four-word sentences.

More than a month since he was viciously bashed while on his way to work at Dee Why, Bepin's recovery continues to be measured in the most basic of intervals: waking from a 10-day coma, regaining the ability to move, to eat, to talk.

"He cannot give proper answers, his speech is very difficult," Bepin's father, Bishnu, warned.

As Bepin continued speaking, Bishnu looked on, the picture of a stoic father, determined to be a pillar of strength for his son. But even he cannot hide his sadness as he listens to his clever boy, who came to Australia to complete a master's degree, but now struggles to understand simple questions.

Earlier this week, Bepin was transferred from the Royal North Shore Hospital, where he had spent the past month, to the Rehabilitation Centre at Ryde to begin his long road to recovery.

"The physiotherapy here is very good, I am getting better," Bepin added.

The centre is where Bepin will be housed as he receives intensive treatment in its Brain Injury Unit.

In a testament to his determination, Bepin has already made a marked improvement since he first arrived at the centre.

"When he came here he could not speak, now in a few days he can speak again," Bishnu said.

While he is still struggling to come to terms with his new surroundings, Bepin said he is much more at home at the centre than he had been in hospital.

"I have just been here for three or four days," he said. "I am still not quite used to this place, it is a lot different.

"But now it is good, the people are friendly, and they are quite helpful, too.

"I have my friends coming in here, it is very good."

At the centre, Bepin's days will be taken up with an exhaustive rehabilitation program, including speech pathology, physiotherapy, neuro and clinical psychology, as well as recreational and occu-

pational therapy sessions.

Although it is too early for any concrete estimates, Bepin's family have been told to expect up to 12 months of rehabilitation, with a full recovery far from being guaranteed.

Jim Towers, the centre's community relations manager, said rehabilitation for patients such as Bepin was usually a slow process.

"It is very encouraging the advances Bepin has made just in the short time he has been here," he said.

"We would expect him to continue making advances . . . but in Bepin's case, it would be too early to say just how long each stage of the rehabilitation will take."

But Bepin is resolute to overcome the obstacles still in front of him and said he will complete the accounting degree he began, carrying his own and his family's dreams for a better life in the future.

"I am almost halfway through. I want to finish," he said.

■ Donations to help Bepin and his family can be made via a benefit trust which is being administered by a local accounting firm, free of charge.

Account name: Bepin Charan Shrestha Benefit Trust

Bank: National Australia Bank
BSB: 082-183. **Acct No.** 16-808-4981



Bashing victim Bepin is working towards recovery at the Ryde Rehab Centre. His dad Bishnu is by his side

Picture: SIMON DEAN -PP37682



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BEPIN'S LONG ROAD

■ **Sunday, January 31:** Between 4.30am and 5am, Bepin Shrestha is assaulted on his way to work at Dee Why Fresh Butchery. Police allege he was grabbed from behind and knocked to the ground. It is alleged he was repeatedly kicked in the head. He is taken to Royal North Shore Hospital, suffering from extensive head injuries, lacerations and bruising. Police arrest Melenga Kanongataa, 19, and a 17-year-old Tongan national.

■ **Monday, February 1:** Mr Kanongataa is refused bail. The 17-year-old appears in court and is granted bail. They are each charged with causing grievous bodily harm.

■ **Tuesday, February 9:** Bepin wakes in hospital from his coma.

■ **Monday, March 1:** Bepin transferred to the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney, at Ryde.