

Nature Nurtures

I did not grow up surrounded by sprawling forests or endless green fields. My connection to nature was shaped not by firsthand experiences but by stories—stories told by my Maa, who grew up in a place where nature thrived. Through her words, I felt connected to an environment I had never truly known, and learned to appreciate the natural world beyond the limits of my cityscape.

Maa didn't just tell stories—she lived by the principles of sustainability, embedding them in our daily lives and, in turn, in me. I still remember her say : “Maya, you should never take any resource for granted”. We took that lesson seriously in the Gurung household. Any sunlit corner became a place to grow vegetables, and no container was ever discarded if it could serve a new purpose. Old clothes were mended or repurposed, glass jars found new life in pickling, and appliances were carefully maintained instead of being replaced. Nothing was wasted. Even water had its place—the grey water from the kitchen nourished her garden, while food scraps became compost. I didn't realize it then, but these everyday rituals formed the foundation of my understanding of environmental sustainability.

Leaving home for Kamloops, to pursue my undergraduate studies was more than just a change in scenery—it was a shift of my community and my perspective. TRU provided not only an academic platform but also a space to share stories and foster a deeper understanding of the

natural world. It was here that I gained insight into the intricate interactions between all living beings and the environment, solidifying my commitment to sustainability.

As I delved deeper into my studies, courses like *Introduction to Microbiology* opened my eyes to the unseen world of microbes and their profound impact on ecosystems, human health, and climate change. Dr. Cheeptham introduced the concept of One Health, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life. This perspective resonated deeply with me, reflecting my mother's teachings about the delicate balance of nature.

Building on this foundation, I had the opportunity to attend drone workshops led by Dr. Church, who specializes in precision ranching— an approach that enhances farming practices and reducing resource consumption. One of the most intriguing aspects I explored during these workshops was the profound impact of the climate crisis on agriculture and the looming threat to food security. This issue extends beyond humans, affecting the plants and animals that depend on us—a perspective I had never deeply considered before .This realization significantly broadened my understanding of sustainability, pushing me to think beyond traditional conservation efforts and consider the interconnectedness of all living systems.

At TRU, they equally focus on practical knowledge and real-world application. There are many opportunities, but one that I still remember is the field trips I took for Intro to Ecology. This course deepened my understanding of food webs, nutrient cycling, and trophic interactions. The field trips were invaluable, especially the visit to Lac Le Jeune, where we observed vegetation shifts with elevation and gained field techniques like species identification and mapping vegetation types. We also explored succession and post-wildfire regeneration near

Juniper, Kamloops, which highlighted the importance of ecological resilience and sustainability. These hands-on experiences allowed me to witness ecological principles in action, helping me appreciate how natural processes and disturbances shape the environment. They further solidified my passion for ecological sustainability and the need for proactive conservation efforts.

Beyond academics, my role as a Sustainability Ambassador at TRU provided hands-on experience in environmental advocacy. Through peer outreach, I promoted initiatives like the Fill It Forward campaign and the BioBlitz event. Designing posters, engaging in meaningful discussions, and fostering student involvement strengthened my communication and leadership skills. These experiences reinforced the power of small, consistent actions in driving environmental change, bridging my academic knowledge with real-world applications.

All of this knowledge laid a strong foundation, but more importantly, it nurtured my ability to think critically. Professors and peers consistently introduced me to new perspectives—some unfamiliar, yet thought-provoking. I learned the invaluable skill of questioning information—Why? How?—recognizing that not everything we hear or see is accurate. This habit of critical thinking will serve me well throughout my life, ensuring I approach sustainability challenges with a well-informed and analytical mindset.

As I close this chapter and step into the next, I reflect on the vast array of knowledge I have gained at TRU. My undergraduate experience has shaped me into someone deeply committed to integrating sustainability into both my career and personal life. My passion for this field has driven me to pursue a future as an environmental consultant, where I can develop tangible solutions for a more sustainable world. TRU has been a vital stepping stone in my

advocacy journey, equipping me with the knowledge and skills to make a lasting impact.

Eventually, I hope to build a community of like-minded individuals dedicated to environmental change, fostering collaboration, and inspiring action for a healthier planet. Through education, advocacy, and community engagement, I hope to inspire others to recognize the intrinsic value of the natural world and the urgent need to protect it.

Sustainability, after all, more than just preserving the environment—it's also about preserving the stories, connections, and possibilities that give life its meaning.