KATHMANDU, Nepal — Pemba Sherpa was not looking for honors or awards when he and others launched the Sherpa Foundation in 2015. He was trying to keep the Sherpa Foundation's work under the radar, to avoid government interference. But it’s tough to keep a low profile when you rebuild 23 homes and repair and renovate 140 more. Throw in a few monasteries for good measure, and people notice.

So there he was in Nepal’s capital building standing before Nepal’s first female president, Bidhya Devi Bhandari, and flanked by the prime minister and other high-ranking Nepali officials receiving Nepal’s highest award, the Medal of Honor.

"To see all those people — the president, the prime minister and so many others — in one place, and I was also in that place, it was amazing," Pemba said.

"I am so blessed to receive this from Nepal’s first female president." In Nepal, the Medal of Honor is Jana (Public) Sewa (Serving) Shri (High-honor) Pahud (Medal or Award).

"We use the same name in the U.S. for bravery in battle," said Dana Dunbar, one of the Sherpa Foundation’s pillars.

THREE TIMES AROUND THE WORLD

Pemba has made three trips to Nepal in the last year, which is located on the other side of our planet.

There’s a short video clip of the ride. Pemba took to the track. He’s in the police chief’s vehicle. Kathmandu’s two top-ranking police officials are in the back seat, and Pemba is in the front.

"I walked in with them and people kept saluting me," Pemba said smiling.

He has appeared on national television to talk about the Sherpa Foundation’s work in Nepal and the United States, and during the interview the reporter snapped, “How do we know you did all this?”

Pemba smiled softly and quietly replied, “It’s right along the trekking route that thousands of tourists walk through the Everest region. You can take a stroll and see for yourself.”

The nominations start at the grassroots level and trickle up. They start at the local level, then to the district, and finally to the national government where the hope is that it lands on the right desk and the person behind it is in a good mood. Pemba learned about his Medal of Honor when a mayor from the Everest region contacted him.

The ceremony was scheduled for May 5, but due to unforeseen events, it was pushed back to May 26.

"The day I got the award was like a dream. I still wasn’t expecting it," Pemba said.

“We did not start out to achieve an award like this, but it’s good to be recognized for all the time and work, and sleepless nights. In all the fundraising and public speaking, I didn’t think we were doing as much as the disasters. But when you calculate it all, much has been accomplished.”

RAINBOWS AND RAIN

During another trip, he buttonholed Um Hong Gill, the legendary climber from South Korea. In this world there are 18,800-meter peaks. Gill has climbed all of them. He spends most of his money building schools, community centers and medical facilities. Pemba was chatting with friends at an official function in Kathmandu when they were introduced. Pemba asked Gill if some help rebuilding a 100-year-old Buddhist temple destroyed in the 2015 earthquakes and their aftershocks.

Gill agreed, and brought a TV crew and some of his trekking buddies to the dedication ceremony, and put the square on them to help pay for it. They did.

"I feel so blessed to be able to meet people like this," Pemba said.

Pemba would also want to be on the front line if he was there.

That dedication was May 13, the heart of Nepal’s monsoon season. The sky cleared and there was a rainbow ring around the sun, which the Buddhists would say bodes well for the monastery’s future. That, and the fact that it was reconstructed on concrete pillars to make it earthquake resistant.

“When people with clear hearts get together, miracles happen," Pemba said smiling.