

Everest 2011
Summit of Memories

Mt Everest
May 21, 2011

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The South Col route from Nepal
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With the press of one button on my satellite phone, I called Cathy, my wife. "I made it! I am on the top of the world.", I squeaked as my voice was thin after climbing with supplemental oxygen throughout the night. "I know, I can see you on the map!" Cathy had been tracking me since my departure from the South Col using the SPOT GPS system.

I was halfway through my summit of Mt. Everest at 5:00 AM on May 21, 2011. As the winds picked up to 40 mph and the temps hovered around -20F, I still had to descend to the safety of the lower camps.

Climbing Mt. Everest had been an elusive goal for me since 2002. In three previous attempts, I had turned back on the summit push near or below the Balcony at 27,500', a flat spot above the Triangular Face on the Southeast Ridge and beginning of the final route to the summit.

My previous efforts had been stymied by my own physical and mental weaknesses, underestimating the climb and logistical snafus. But also, perhaps, the lack of purpose was the root cause of my "non-summits".

The Beginning

I started climbing mountains, big mountains, at age 38 with a summit of Europe's Mont Blanc. Something connected with me during that climb and I went to Nepal for a trek where I saw some of the world's highest and most famous mountains: Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam and Mt. Everest.

I admired them and quickly dismissed them as too high, too expensive, too much time from work and a thousand more reasons. But the seed was planted and a year later I was climbing Cho Oyu, the world's sixth highest peak. Then Ama Dablam, once called unclimbable by Sir Edmund Hillary; and in 2002, my first attempt on Everest.

Now, 9 years later, my Thai flight, TG319, landed in Kathmandu. The air was moist with humidity, warm, almost hot, as I navigated the steep stairs from the giant Boeing 777. Greeted by the local contacts on behalf of International Mountain Guides (IMG), I joined a few of my fellow teammates in a van for the ride to the Hotel Tibet just outside of the touristy Thamel district of Kathmandu.

Kathmandu had not changed significantly since my first visit in 1997. The potholed and dusty roads were still littered with garbage, thousands of people walked the sidewalks along with the occasional cow. It was not uncommon to see several men walking holding a corpse on a litter above their heads. The air was thick with a combination of humidity, dust and pollution. It was sad to see the lack of progress in this beautiful country and the impact on their wonderful people.

I had selected IMG for my Everest climb based on my years of climbing experience. Today, there are many companies who guide Everest but I was not looking for a guide. I was looking for a partner for a much broader cause. A call two years earlier with Eric Simonson and Phil Ershler confirmed they were the right company.

Ida

“I am glad you got that out of your system.” my mom, Ida, said upon my return from Cho Oyu in 1998. “And what makes you think I will not be climbing more?”, I replied defensively. My mother and I had a great relationship. She was quite business oriented; returning to work after seeing her two sons reach age 10. She loved business and the business world. Her mind was sharp, her memory was solid. Seeing me take 4 to 8 weeks off from my successful and growing career made zero sense to her. So her question was not only out of curiosity but also a commentary.

However, I continued to climb and she continued to question, but soon the question became “What is your next climb?” She came to understand that climbing was not a mid-life crisis but rather a passion that provided me satisfaction not found in business. Over time she fully supported my climbs and I loved telling her all the details of the far away places I visited. She had an insatiable curiosity for new things and this was a new source.



However, during a Christmas visit in 2003, something changed. Ida took great pride in her house, keeping it clean and neat as well as her own appearance. But that holiday, I noticed a dramatic change. The house was not quite right, she wore the same clothes for several days, her hair not perfect. I asked my father if he saw the changes and he acknowledged them but said they were busy, or aging or some things were just not as important as they used to be. He had changed as well.

Together they were covering up the obvious, mom’s memory as failing as quickly as my father’s physical health. Together for over 50 years, they knew each other too well and they would protect one another to the end. We spoke with the neighbors. They had seen

the signs, the wandering, getting lost, normal upkeep slipping by. They were also worried.

My brother and I pleaded with them to get help, have a visiting nurse come by to check their medicines, reach out for help with aging and dementia; talk to their doctor. They mostly ignored our pleas but did talk to their long time doctor. He confirmed that mom had early Alzheimer's and put her on the only medicine available to treat the symptoms.

Over the next few years, our pleading grew louder asking them to consider moving into a long term facility where they could be looked after, to move in with us or at least our towns; but again they were settled and were not going to budge. At least we discussed end of life care, living wills and fully understood their wishes. But another change soon occurred.

My father's health was failing quickly. Congestive heart failure, kidney disease and more. The paramedics had made multiple trips to their home, each time taking my father to the emergency room. He was living by a thread. My mom would pass it off as aging. But then he went to the hospital in very serious condition.

I flew home to see what I could do. That night, with just my mom and I in the house, she moved furniture to block the door to her bedroom. Hearing the noise I asked her if there was something wrong. "I know who you are." she said to me with fear and anger in her voice. "Yes, I'm Alan, mom." "Just stay away." was her only response. The next morning she asked over breakfast "Now, who are you?"

The next three years would see my mother slip away into the fog of Alzheimer's. I took early retirement from 30 years with HP to oversee my mother's care.

Trekking the Khumbu

I took a step over the small rock on the dirt trail of the Khumbu. Trekking to Everest Base Camp had always been a highlight of my climbs in the Himalaya. This was my sixth time to walk these trails. I thought about my mom and what had changed in the 14 years I had been walking these trails.

Staying in the teahouses, it seemed that everyone now had a cell phone. The rooms were cleaner, the food better; electricity was now readily available to charge computers and sat phones. Life was much easier outside of Kathmandu but still tough even by third world standards.

Yaks and Zos were loaded with gear headed to Everest. Trekkers filled the teahouses and trails and us climbers; well we were taking our time to let our bodies adjust to the altitude. We started at Lukla, 9250' and were headed to Everest Base Camp at 17,500' If we went too fast, we would get altitude sickness. So trekking a few hours a day and staying at the teahouses for an extra night or two allowed us to arrive in good shape.

Our IMG team was large, almost 30 climbers and trekkers in total; over 70 Sherpas and cooks. But we were split into sub teams so that we rarely saw the so-called Hybrid team. They had two western guides plus a personal Sherpa each.



Our team was on the Classic program with

one Personal Sherpa each to assist us in the climb. I had been concerned about the size of the IMG teams but reached a comfort level with this division. But more importantly, I had come to depend on western guides too much in my previous climbs and wanted to do this on my own with only a Sherpa to assist me. I was not disappointed.

The 7 Summits Climb for Alzheimer's

On a conference call with Eric and Phil, principles of IMG, in 2009; I simply laid it out. "My mom has Alzheimer's and I want to make a difference through increasing the public's awareness, and raising \$1M for research through climbing the 7 Summits in one year. I need a solid climbing partner for logistics, but not handholding, so I can safely attempt the summits while doing fundraising in between climbs."

We discussed the schedule, order of climbs and many more details. They called back in a few days and said they were in. With my climbing taking shape, I still needed a large corporate partner to help offset the expenses but more importantly to drive a large scale public relations campaign to tell the world what we were doing and why. Above all, I wanted to honor my mother and all those with Alzheimer's and their families through my climbing. IMG understood this and I needed to find another partner who would as well.

I contacted every company that might be interested in this project - outdoor, gear, travel, supplies and the obvious ones in health care - pharmaceuticals, hospitals, insurance but with the slowing US economy and near depression environment my timing could not have been worse. Most of my letters, calls and emails were ignored but a few companies called to turn me down in person. I understood. After all, who was this 50+ year-old man with this dream of climbing mountains? Was he just looking for someone to pay for his vacation, as one boot company VP told me? Or was he just another dreamer out there with ideas and no follow thru?

Alzheimer's was an old person disease. It had no cure and it was not as sexy as some of the other diseases; I was told bluntly. How mistaken they were. But some told me of their own personal experiences with the disease, how it took their parent or grandparent away from them, how they cared for them as a teenager - how it robbed them of those years. Others told me of how it destroyed their families when their loved one moved in; the toll it took on their finances; how devastating it was to see them slip away.

I told them I understood and we agreed on the tragic affect of the disease but then they said they could not support my project. We hung up agreeing to never give up on finding a cure. I posted on my own Blog that if I could sing or dance to raise the money, I would; but I climb mountains so that was the vehicle for my efforts. I just needed to find the right partners.

Another year passed and I sought out support from non-profits promising to dedicate my life to this effort beyond the climbs. This was easy because I had already made that commitment to myself and Cathy. They wanted my fund raising efforts but had no ability to promote or support the project. Another blow.

Every Dream has Hope

The computer buzzed with the arrival of a new email. A High School friend saw me on Facebook where I had posted my project and plans. Quietly I had suggested if anyone knew anyone who could help, please let me know. Over the next six months this network developed and the email brought a contact and hope.

Janssen Alzheimer's Immunotherapy was doing research on a new Alzheimer's drug. It was joint project with Pfizer. The network of contacts had found them and they were interested in talking to me about my project. They wanted to focus on education and awareness; not drugs, not products. They supported my desire to raise money and agreed with me that all donations go directly to the non-profits. I wanted to make it clear that this was about funding research from the donations, not climbing.

Another six months passed and my dream of The 7 Summits Climb for Alzheimer's: Memories are Everything became real. I summited the highest peak in Antarctica, Mt. Vinson in December 2010 and the highest in South America, Aconcagua in January.

Now I walked into the IMG Base Camp at the base of the Khumbu icefall to attempt Mt. Everest for the fourth time but with a more important message than just another summit.

Everest Base Camp

As I entered Base Camp, IMG's Nepal operator for decades, Ang JangBu, greeted me. "Hello Alan, I want you to meet Kami, your Personal Sherpa." he said shaking my hand. I was surprised at such a warm greeting. Standing next to him was a small man, a Sherpa; Kami Sherpa. "Hello, I am Kami, your Personal Sherpa." he said with immense pride. JangBu continued, "Kami has 11 Everest summits plus multiple summits of Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam and climbs on K2." I looked at this man with deep admiration and excitement. He simply smiled.



We spoke for a few minutes only to discover I had climbed with his brother,

Ang Dorge of the Adventure Consultants 1996 disaster fame on my first two Everest attempts in 2002 and 2003. Kami, at age 46, was Ang Dorge's older brother. He showed me my two person Base Camp tent and I crawled inside to start unpacking my duffles.

As I sat there, crossed legged, I slowly pulled my down sleeping bag out of the stuff sack. I looked out the tent door to see the surrounding peaks and Pumori off to my right. The wind blew gently across the clear blue skies. I took a deep breath as I knew why I was here and what I needed to do. Kami stood outside for a moment before leaving me with a strong sense of confidence. This was going to work, I told myself.

The next two days we got settled into our new homes. The team began the process of shifting from trekking to climbing as the trekkers soon left. It was time to start getting our bodies ready for the summit push that was still almost a month away.

Acclimatizing on Lobuche

The accepted way of climbing these big mountains is to make a series of ever higher climbs to greater altitudes to trick the body into creating more red blood cells that carry oxygen to the muscles. This “climb high, sleep low” routine had been established for decades. However, on Everest, from Nepal, this meant multiple climbs through the Khumbu Icefall, a 2,000’ moving glacier that served as the gateway to the higher camps. The Icefall had become the most dangerous section of a south side climb with climbers falling to their deaths into crevasses, crushed by falling ice structures or from avalanches. Operator after operator now sought an alternative way of acclimatizing that did not require trips through the icefall.



IMG along with Russell Brice's Himalayan Experience, aka Himex,

were now using a 20,000’ peak near Everest Base Camp (EBC) for the first round of so called acclimatization rotations.

Lobuche Peak was a popular trekking peak not requiring strong technical skills or special gear. It was a five hour trek from Base Camp we passed on our way in. So once we arrived at EBC and got settled, we back tracked to tackle this peak.

IMG had a mini Base Camp established complete with a cook and dining tent with table and chairs. We arrived to our shared tents and prepared to leave the next day for the High Camp and on to the summit that night. It was an excellent practice run for what would be summit night on Everest.

Kami and I left for Lobuche's summit at 3:00 AM, six hours later we stood on the summit of East Lobuche. It was a good run and increased my confidence that he was the perfect fit for me.

However, during this climb, my head became congested and I started to lose my normal energy. I was getting sick. This seems to be part of every big mountain climb but I had hoped that by taking the slow trek in and avoiding the crowds; I had sidestepped getting sick. But as my head became more congested, my cough deeper and my lungs weaker, I knew something was going on.

The next rotation was through the Icefall and to the high camps of 1 and 2 in the Western Cwm. I had tried to rest up but had avoided any drugs to treat my congestion and was feeling better. By now our Classic team had split into two sub groups further making the teams smaller. I was on the second team to give me an extra day to get better. Our EBC routine had been set with breakfast at 8, lunch at noon and dinner at 6. In between we would take short walks, check gear, chat, read or sleep.

The weather was strange. I had been involved with Everest for almost 10 years and had never seen such unpredictability. The normal pattern of good April weather, poor early May then nice for the late May summit windows was upside down. This April, each afternoon brought wind, clouds and snow. The temps were cold, atmosphere damp. The weather forecasts were consistently wrong both for Base Camp and high up on the mountain. I became slightly concerned that 2011 may turn into one of those years when the mountain just says no.

The Khumbu Icefall

On April 24th, I entered the Khumbu Icefall for the first time since 2008. In spite of my previous over 30 trips through the Icefall, I still found it an amazing and frightening place. IMG's Base Camp was a bit away from the main EBC due to the size and desire for a bit more peace and quiet. Everest Base Camp is like a small city with all the noise, and congestion that comes with the territory. But it required an extra 30 minutes to reach the base of the Icefall.

Kami and I reached Crampon Point where we attached our crampons to our high altitude boots. The normal schedule was breakfast at 3:00 AM, walking at 3:30 to avoid the heat of the sun warming the fragile ice and increasing the dangers. So with headlamps on, we began to navigate the frozen waterfall. The route starts to climb quickly but mellows before reaching an area called the Popcorn; then the Football Field and finally the upper Icefall. Each section had its own unique personality but it was the never ending creaks and groans that caught our attention.

Avalanches off Everest's West Shoulder had killed several Sherpas over the past few years, any noise sets off the sixth sense in the Sherpas. The Icefall Doctors, a team of six Sherpas who set the safety line, aka fixed rope, each year had already established

then route. 2011 found the Icefall direct and simple. Only 15 ladders were needed to cross the deepest and widest crevasses. This meant a faster than normal climb, safer for everyone; especially the Sherpas who would do 3 to 4 times the number of trips as the western climbers.

As the sun rose, the upper Icefall became lit; the summit of Pumori across from EBC shown brightly. A slight wind was created as the temperature started to increase. I found my breathing steady but not labored. Perhaps all my training for the previous year and half was paying off. Kami set the lead but the route was clear being filled with Sherpas and climbers from all teams among their way to the Cwm for their own rotations and stocking camps.



I paused for a moment and took it all. I looked at the ice sculptures with admiration. Each one unique a product of wind and movement. The Icefall can move three feet a day thus creating a new formation every few weeks. But this movement also created dangers, hidden crevasses and unstable seracs that could fall at any moment. Kami and I moved quickly when the route took a path under one of these towering giants.

We climbed easily and steady. The fixed rope showed the route over, under and around each section. The hard snow provided a solid footbed most of the time. But short jumps were required over the narrowest of crevasses without ladders. As I took my first step onto one of the dual ladders, I focused my eyes on the ladder rungs, avoiding the deep abyss of the crevasse. I placed my crampons points carefully on the rungs; toes on front, the heel on the back. I clipped my carabiner onto the fixed rope assuming it would hold me in case of a fall. Each step was precise, each one took me closer to the other side knowing I would repeat this sequence hundreds of time over the next month.

We reached the upper section of the Icefall and the difficulty stepped up a notch. The angle increased, the few ladders became longer and the effects of the altitude took its toll. My breathing became labored, my pace slowed down.

I started my lecture. "Alan, listen. You are not in competition with anyone. Climb at your own pace. If you need Kami to slow down, tell him.

This is your year. You have a reason to climb this mountain. Slow down, Don't burn yourself out on this first trip. No one is keeping a clock on you. Let the others go by. One step, then the second and a third" About this time, Kami turned around, looked at me in the eyes and simply said "Slowly." This was going to work.



The Heat of the Western Cwm

We topped out of the Icefall and entered the Western Cwm. This is a large valley surrounded on three sides by some of the world's greatest mountains: Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse. The snow was bright as the sun now reached their walls. I could feel the heat reflecting off the icy surfaces. We continued to gain altitude but now the route was somewhat steady void of the ups and downs of the Icefall. Falling seracs were no longer a concern, just hidden crevasses. I had taken 6:45 minutes, not very fast but not the slowest time. I tried to tell myself that time did not matter.

Over a small rise was a series of yellow tents. Camp 1 at 19,500' sat perched in the Cwm. A series of tents serving as the first weigh station. As I passed the long series of tents, perhaps over 100, climbers stuck their heads out to see who was passing by or just to say hello. IMG had a cooking tent set up, nice. The Sherpas melted snow and topped off our bottles. Soon we had a simple dinner. The schedule was to spend the next day here before moving higher to Camp 2 at 21,000. I shared my tent with Simon and soon we both fell asleep.

In one of the paradoxes of Everest, you are often more hot than cold. And it is never more true than in the reflective environment of the Western Cwm. As the day wore on, the temperature inside the tent went over 100F. Even the proven trick of putting a sleeping bag on the tent roof reduced the temperature inside by only a few degrees. I went from three layers to two to one and then the bare minimum.

I remembered my first time at this Camp 1 in 2008, the wind blew so hard, the tent was lifted off the snow; only the weight of two grown men kept it from flying away. But 2011 was calm, strangely so. The next day, we made our move to the next camp, 2, called Advanced Base Camp by many teams. IMG had a full time cook there plus a dining tent and a slew of sleeping tents. Our job as climbers was to simply rest and



let our bodies adjust. We were scheduled for two nights but I felt good and proposed to Kami an extra night to build more reserves. He agreed.

Hurting but not Hurt

That night I had the uninspired dinner of pasta and tiny vienna sausages. As soon as I finished eating, I knew something was not right. My congestion from Lobuche had eased but not gone away entirely. As I crawled into the tent with Simon, I felt strange. The pattern was to go to bed at sunset as the temperature dropped quickly so this meant 7:00 PM at this high camp. I rolled over on my side, then my back and back to my side. Simon, trying to read noticed my anxiety. I must have fallen asleep but awoke with a start three hours later. Time had come to get this over with. I sat straight up, my breath visible in the cold temps inside our tent. I moved with purpose to the zippered door, opened it and immediately vomited into the snow covered the vestibule.

I looked at Simon and said “that was fun.” He handed me some tissues as the snow started to fall harder. I am not sure why this had happened but I felt better, for the moment and fell back asleep. As the snow covered the tent, I slept through the night before hearing my name. Kami was there at dawn to get us moving. A foot of fresh snow covered the Western Cwm and more was on the way.

As I sat up, a new wave overtook me and just as Kami unzipped the door, I vomited again into the vestibule. I looked at him and said I was sorry and had been sick. He looked at me as said “you did not tell me.” And with that I knew, Kami was not my Personal Sherpa, but my friend. We soon left Camp 2 back to Base Camp at a moderate pace. Kami keeping an ever-present eye on his guard.

I arrived in Base Camp shattered, not defeated but still shaken at how bad I felt. I was exhausted after the down-climb through the Icefall. I was dehydrated. I needed sleep. But I also knew that this was nothing compared to climbing the Lhotse Face and the demands of summit night. I was hurting but not hurt.

I consulted with IMG expedition leader Greg Vernovage and JangBu. We took a trip to the see the resident Doctors at EverestER. This was a volunteer kind of field hospital that treated climbers from any expedition for a one-time fee of \$100 per person. For that, all the Sherpas, porters and local Nepalese received free treatment. A wonderful arrangement fully supported by IMG and many of the other expeditions. The diagnosis was an upper respiratory infection, bronchitis, and I was put on antibiotics.

The next three days were miserable. My head was fully congested compete with runny nose and cough. Every time I laid down, I coughed so badly I had to sit back up. I was worried that this URI had turned into some form of mild HAPE or pulmonary edema but frequent checks of my lungs showed that they were clear. But I was not sleeping and daytime rest was hard to come by. I knew I would get sick, everyone does on Everest, but this was moving from annoying to serious. Something had to give or my climb was at risk. I consulted with the Docs again plus a Doctor who was with a team from the Dominican Republic climbing Everest with IMG. We all agreed to change my antibiotics. And with that change, my recovery started. An interesting phenomena was occurring in the Khumbu that some viruses were developing a resistance to certain antibiotics. Perhaps this was the case with me.

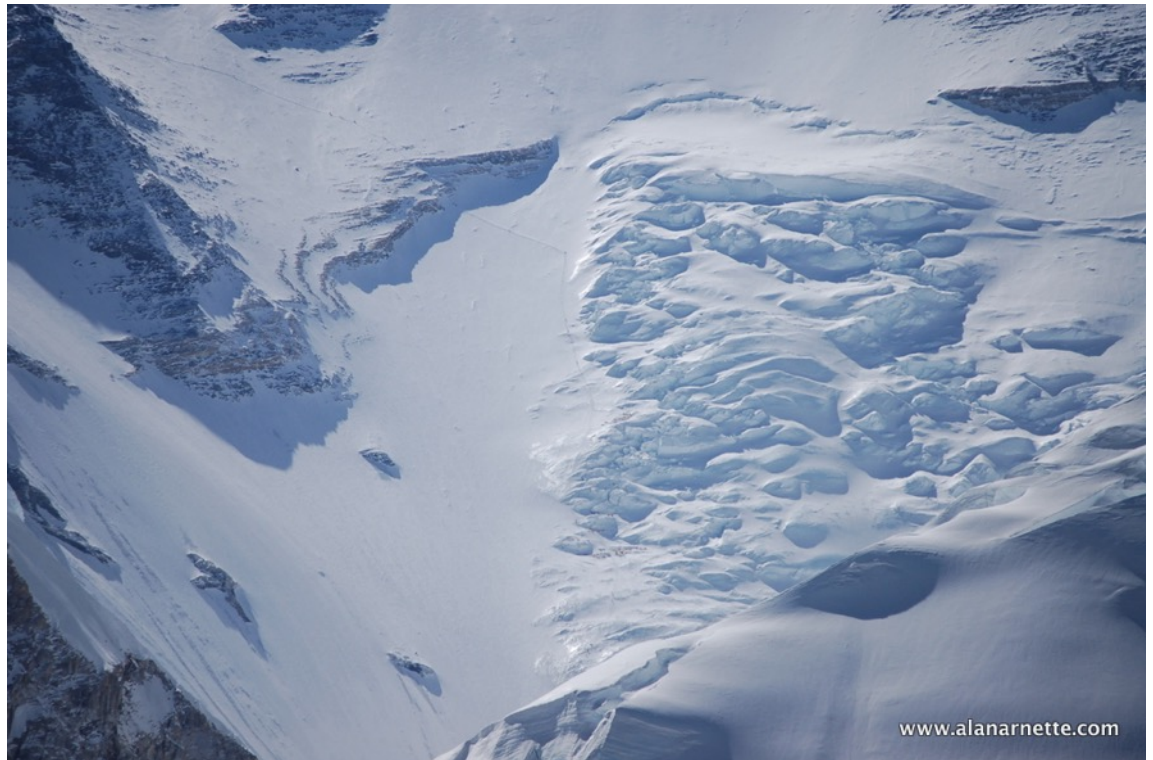
All this illness had put me way off the schedule for everyone else and I still had a three day course of antibiotics to take plus I needed at least two full days being recovered to rest up for the next rotation. With this being the end of April, I had plenty of time but the clock was ticking.

Death on the Lhotse Face

May 1st, as I rested in my tent, I heard voices from the IMG communication tent. They were anxious, determined, professional. I heard about oxygen, extra help and other

keywords that hinted at a problem. The worst had happened and it had happened to a friend climbing with the Hybrid team.

We had summited Vinson together only five months ago. He had trekked to Base Camp with his wife, whom I had gotten to know a little. He was a climber like me; a few years younger but full of life and excitement for this the last climb of his 7 Summits. We shared a lot with our love of



climbing and sense of adventure and accomplishment that comes along with our expeditions. We both loved the cold wind in our faces, the sleepless nights, the challenge and the hardships that came along with the extreme climbing.

On Vinson, when the winds knocked over the snow walls we had built around the cooking tent, Rick was the first one out with the shovel trying to fix it. His parka pulled around his head in the howling winds, he seemed more like a kid playing in the snow than a man trying to protect the valuable cooking gear. But his resolve to fix the problem showed his seriousness with the situation.

He collapsed suddenly while climbing to Camp 3. Over 20 guides from multiple expeditions, several doctors who were climbing in the area and multiple Sherpas all tried to revive him, but to no avail. The cause of death was and still is unknown. It shook the entire IMG team to our core as well as across Everest Base Camp. If he had died from an avalanche or a fall; it might have been better understood.

Knowing the clock was ticking for my acclimatization, I focused on my climb as the tragedy of Rick occupied my mind. I had seen death before on expeditions and knew the common theme most often spoken of was to make the climb to honor the fallen. So I made my plans for my next rotation, this time to camp 3 at 24,000 on the Lhotse Face.

Howling winds at Camp 3

It is said that a night at Camp 3 is your ticket to try the summit. It was a test for the summit push, a test of your fitness. It is all this and more. The Lhotse Face represents the first real climbing on Everest. While still not technically Everest, it is on Lhotse, the fourth highest peak in the world, it is as close as many people get to Everest.

The Face requires almost 2500' of climbing to go from Camp 2 at 21,500' to Camp 3 at 24,000' on rock hard ice at angles from 20 to 50 degrees. In other words, it is difficult. And at these altitudes, every ounce of your determination and focus is tested. As I had learned in previous climbs, if you struggle getting to Camp 3, you will struggle the rest of the way; if you make it that far.



Kami and I made our climb through the Icefall the first week of May. We stayed one night at Camp 1, a bit unusual but part of my plan not to waste energy abiding to arbitrary schedules. It took an extra day but that just added to my acclimatization was how I viewed it and IMG always had tents at Camp 1 so the logistics supported the strategy. We made our move to Camp 2 the following day. My times only showed a slight improvement over the first rotation not a big surprise given my illness.

We left Camp 2 at 6:00 AM for our climb to C3. the night was cold but with almost no winds was enjoyable. The first section is somewhat flat as we made our way across the far eastern end of the Western Cwm and to the base of the Lhotse Face. A large bergshrund, or deep crevasse, marked the bottom of the Face. We took a short ladder over the crack and clipped into the fixed lines; something that would be continuous from here to the summit.

I found the climb as difficult as I remembered it but not as tough on my body as before, my training was paying off. Each step on the icy Face required focus. 2011 had the fewest climbers in almost a decade due to the economic woes in the world so the lack of traffic had not created the normal footsteps into the ice. Thus each step required directed effort to place crampons points securely onto the angled ice.

Kami and I took it slowly as we gained altitude. There were three levels of camps on the Face due to the lack of semi flat surfaces from which the Sherpas cut tent platforms. IMG's tents were at the highest level nearly 24,000'; over 500' higher than the lowest camp. This was good for the climb to the South Col because it shortened the day by over an hour but for the first climb to this camp, we had some choice thoughts for the route designers.

I felt the altitude as I climbed higher and in the middle of the three camps, I came to a complete stop. I drew on my reason for being here and the strength of the people following my climb. I thought of the suffering my mother endured without a single complaint. I took one step then a second and a third and continued higher on the Lhotse



Face. Soon the yellow tents came into view as I passed the area where Rick had collapsed. I paused at the spot. It was steep and covered with hard blue ice. The view of the Western Cwm and surround high mountains defined the reason for climbing. This was a moment and a place forever etched in my memory.

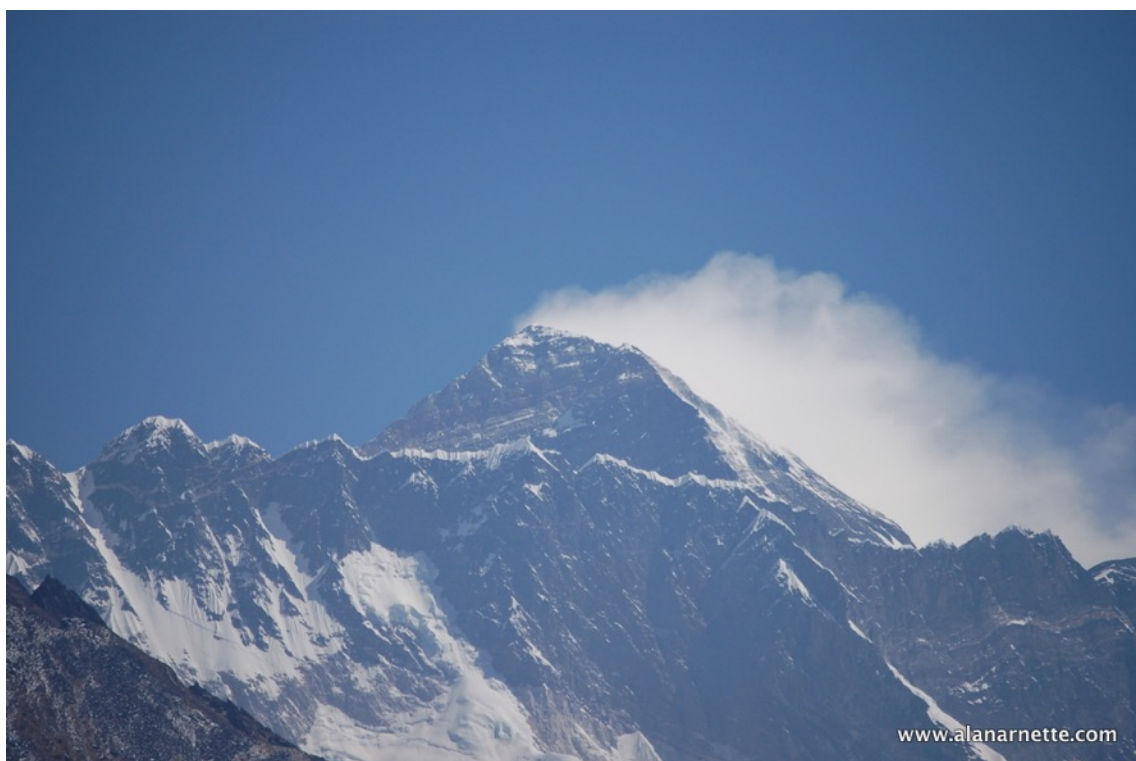
As we reached the tents, the sun was breaking over Lhotse creating deadly heat. The game started, trying to rest while staying as cool as possible - all at 24,000'. The day passed and into the late afternoon, I was awoken by the sound of flapping nylon. The wind had picked up. Not just a bit but soon was howling. I assumed it was a passing event since there was no forecast or warning from Base Camp who was in daily contact with our weather

forecasting service. If it was a serious wind event or storm, we would have known. One of the reasons Everest had become safer was due to more sophisticated weather models and the ability to pinpoint strong storms.

The winds picked up in intensity even as I thought they would rip the tent at their current levels.

Kami was sharing my tent and we looked at each other. He said "normal for Camp 3" but his constant glances gave away his concern. As the night progressed, the winds never let up. Of concern was that the snow levels against the outside walls were increasing. We would occasionally kick the walls to try to remove the snow but it was a losing battle as the winds hardened the snow making it as hard as concrete. I thought perhaps we should take the shovel and move the snow from the outside but with the wind blowing this hard and on the steep angle of the Lhotse Face, it was simply too dangerous.

Sleep was measured in minutes. With each new gust, harder than the last, we would sit straight up and inspect the walls wondering if the poles had broken and the tent would cave in any moment. But the tent lasted through the night and as dawn broke the winds were just as strong as ever. Kami radioed to Base Camp and was told to get us down as



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quickly as possible given the winds were predicted not to let up. So around 8:00 AM we got fully dressed in all our gear, complete with goggles and headed down the Lhotse Face. The wind had eased a bit but gusts still knocked us off our line. We arrived at Camp 2 in about 2 hours to find they had been hit as well destroying some tents.

The Waiting Game

With our sortie to Camp 3 complete, we were now ready for the summit push. The rest of the IMG team was well ahead of me and a few of my teammates. This was fine with me since I liked the smaller groups a bit better. All I needed to do at this point was to rest, eat and hydrate before the summit push; oh and hope for good weather.

The IMG Hybrid team had made their summit push early in the season threading the needle with a day long window. High winds had delayed them but they waited at the South Col and at 10:00 PM, the winds died down and they had a beautiful summit on May 13th. Other teams retreated, including part of the IMG Classic team, causing great concern that they had wasted energy and potentially a summit opportunity. But 2011 was proving to be very strange.



The standard summit window pattern was created when the jet stream moved from its usual position on top of Everest to the north due to monsoons and typhoons in the sub-Indian continent and Indian Ocean. But 2011 had seen the jet parked north of Everest with little movement. There was some speculation of a split jet, part north and part south. But regardless, the weather was proving almost impossible to predict using the usual models. Forecasters threw out some models and refined others as the season

progressed but by now, teams had become skeptical of their usually reliable weather partners.

Another break in the weather was announced and a summit opportunity for May 15. The first part of the Classic team was ready to go and with a few hours notice, they left Base Camp. In a few days they had reached the South Col but again high winds threatened their opportunity. But similar to the Hybrid, they and several other teams left around 9:00 PM with a forecast that the winds would let up. They climbed to the top of the world on May 14th in difficult conditions and some returned with their summit but also some minor frostbite and wind blindness. However, one climber had more severe problems and took a helicopter out of Base Camp. He was expected to suffer no long term effects. Other teams experienced similar conditions and similar results. One team only had five of their 15 clients summit, some with minor frostbite.

I sat in Base Camp wondering when my opportunity would come. I was not anxious. For the past few years, I had been working on my mental toughness, and staying focused on the positive during these climbs. During an Everest expedition of 9 weeks, there is ample opportunity to get distracted and discouraged. But more to the point was mental toughness. In thinking about my past Everest climbs, I reached the conclusion that I had simply given up too easily. As I often say, there are a thousand reason to quit and only a few to continue when it gets tough; and sadly I had chosen to quit. Yes, there were considerations with my health or weather or acclimatization but I think I should have pushed harder during those attempts and also not let so many little things get to me.

But there was more in 2011. The cause I was climbing for and the purpose for the climb. These were constantly on my mind in a motivating way encouraging me to stay focused on the overall objective: Alzheimer's awareness and fund raising through a successful summit. With that in mind, waiting for the summit window took it proper place.

Each day, we would check the forecast for something encouraging. The pressure on the south side is that as summer approaches with the monsoons, the warmer temperature creates havoc with the Icefall. It becomes even more dangerous and for 2011, the Icefall Doctors had declared they would remove the ladders and stop maintaining the route on May 28th; thus the end of the season.

The forecast called for a window around May 25, so that became our new target. So along with the remaining climbers in Camp we settled in taking day climbs to nearby Pumori or to the closest village of Gorak Shep for something different to eat. And then, again our world turned quickly.

The New Opportunity

Greg woke me up with my name at 9:00 PM on May 15th. "Alan, the forecast shows a window for May 20. If you want to go for it you need to leave tonight." I discussed with Greg the details of this new opportunity. Was it another speculative window? How

certain was this forecast? Would there be another opportunity if I didn't take this one? How long was this window? And more. With all my questions answered to the best of his ability and information, I said yes and began packing. I called Cathy on the sat phone for the second time that day, first saying we were on hold and then saying we were a go. Whiplash.

My heart skipped a beat as I pulled my climbing gear out of one duffel and put it into my summit pack. Summit pack. Yes, it was real and happening now. My pack was pretty simple since my summit gear of oxygen mask, regulator, goggles, balaclava, mitts, down suit, heavy Polar fleece layer, thermos and summit food were already at Camp 2. The Sherpas had staged all the oxygen bottles at camp 3 and the South Col. All I had to bring was what I normally climbed with: crampons, 8000m boots, base layer, shell pants and top plus harness. So with a light pack, Kami and I again left Everest Base Camp but this time on the final climb through the Icefall to the Western Cwm.

I felt our pace was slow as we made steady progress higher but arriving at Camp 1, a glance at my watch showed we had cut one and half hours off our previous times. I was getting stronger just like you are supposed to after proper acclimatization. My confidence increased as I quietly nodded approval to myself. We spent the night at Camp 1 again, out of the norm but according to my plan of not pushing myself too hard.

The climb to Camp 2 was equally rewarding reducing the time by 30%. I arrived and still had my appetite, another good sign that my body had adjusted well in spite of losing almost 10% of my body weight over the previous two months.

The schedule was to spend one night at Camp 2 and head up the Lhotse Face but again the weather forecast changed. While we, and over 100 other climbers from different teams were shooting for a summit on May 20th, our forecast called for high winds that morning. So the IMG leaders called for a second night at Camp 2 and a summit date of May 21st. This was actually fine with me because I had planned all along to spend two nights at Camp 2 but would also be good with one. An extra day would only make me stronger. But the weather played in the back of my mind. Our summit window was from May 19th to May 21st so any delay would threaten our opportunity.

We left Camp 2 for Camp 3 requiring another climb up the Lhotse Face; Kami in the lead. This time, I felt more comfortable but still found the climb challenging and very physical. We arrived and again my time had gone down from the last time. This time I shared a tent with Heiko. We shared an oxygen tank through a splitter and rested on a low flow of 1 lpm throughout the day. We talked through the plan for the next 48 hours. As the sun set over Cho Oyu, the realization that I was climbing Everest again really hit me hard.

Using oxygen is somewhat unique to Everest these days. While still common on other 8000m mountains, it is becoming more the exception than the rule. However on Everest, almost every climber uses supplemental oxygen including Sherpas and guides

starting at Camp 3 or Camp 4. As I breathed in the cool air, it triggered memories of my previous climbs. Then I remember breathing heavily, struggling to get the air into my lungs, wondering if the oxygen was flowing at all; if I could take another step. All those insecurities entered my mind. I let them stay for a moment before sweeping them away. This time was different.



The climb to the South Col marked the start of the summit push in my mind. It was new ground for many of the team. It was old memories for me. We left camp 3 around 5:00 AM. Dressed in our full down suits with a 17 pound oxygen bottle in our packs, we clipped into to the fixed lines and set a steady pace towards the Yellow Band, a band of limestone rock crossing the Himalaya in this area. The route goes straight up the Lhotse Face for several hundred feet before traversing over the Yellow Band to the Geneva Spur. I remember watching my teammates steadily increase the distance between us in previous climbs but this time I was able to keep up with my teammates and lead in some cases. The climb over the Yellow Band was straightforward this year. And the Geneva Spur, another jutting rock formation just below the South Col was equally manageable. To my amazement, we arrived at the South Col in about 3 hours; literally less than half my previous times.

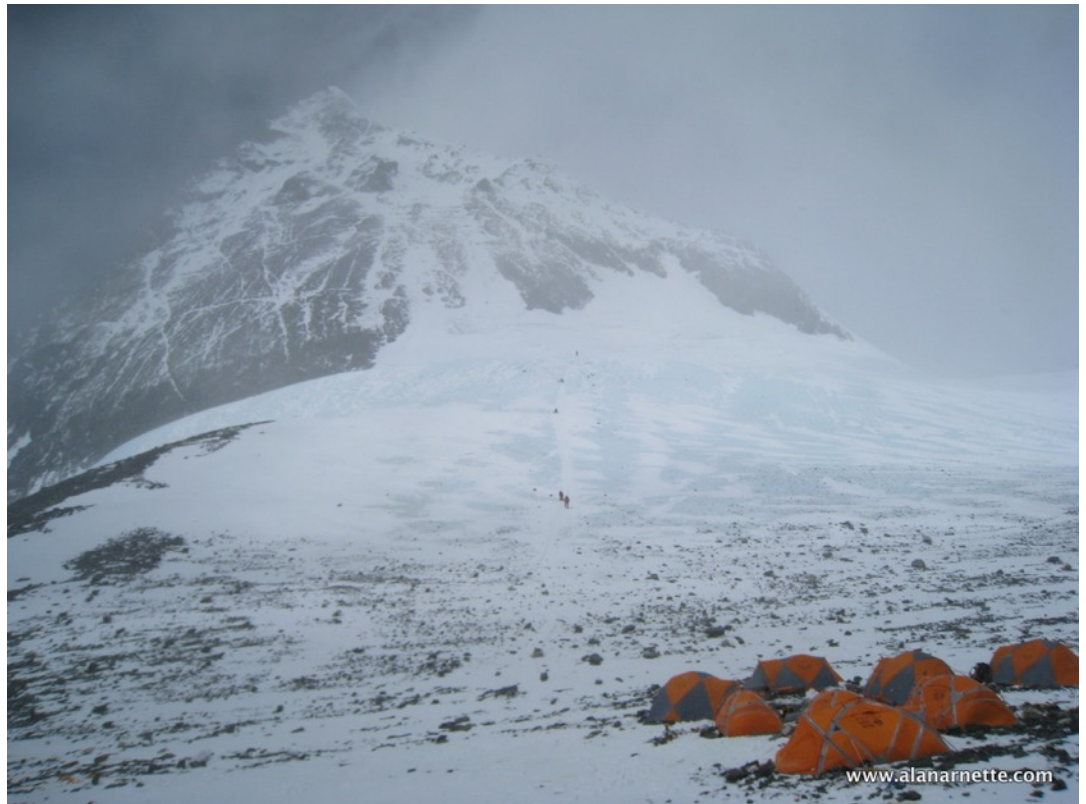
Arriving at 8:00 AM, we now had 12 hours to rest instead of my previous 4 or 6, my confidence soared as I crawled into the tent with Mirjam. With our own bottle each, we rested, ate and hydrated throughout the day on supplemental oxygen. But again the weather teased us. The forecast of calm conditions was turned quickly as the winds gusted to 40 mph throughout the afternoon but were predicted to calm after sunset. However with each gust my stomach flipped reflecting my confidence in the forecasts. I walked around the South Col looking up at the route to the Balcony above the Triangular Face. I located the large rock that marked my turnaround point on previous attempts. I stared at the scene as my mind found its way back to the reason I was here; how good I felt; my confidence in Kami. This was going to work.

I put my down suit back on after the heat of the afternoon had passed. I put my 8000m boots on turned my foot warmers on. I pulled the hand warmers out of their package to start the process of them heating up in the thin air. They went into my liner gloves next to my palm. I put on my oxygen mask, my goggles and hood to make sure everything fit with no gaps. I lay back down on top of my sleeping bag, closed my eyes and visualized the next 12 hours.

With a departure time of 9:00 PM or when the winds died down, I tried to relax. One more call to Cathy and an audio dispatch competed my pre-climb todo list. The absence of sound caught my attention; the quiet was no wind. The time had come.

Summit Time

I stepped out of the tent and saw Kami. I put on my harness, then crampons as he adjusted my oxygen settings. I set my headlamp as my goggles were pushed above my eyes in the calm conditions. The temperature was cold but I didn't notice in my down



suit. Climbers were moving up the Triangular Face, their headlamps marking the route. Kami took off swiftly. I followed closely. Memories of being left behind haunted me from previous climbs. But this time I kept up. As we left the hand line and found the fixed rope, we joined the long line of climbers. But Kami unclipped and started to pass them on the right. He turned back and looked at me. Words were impossible with the oxygen masks but I knew what he wanted and I followed, passing climbers on the way to the Balcony. This was never in the plan.

We climbed in the dark. My down hood blocked my headlamp often but the half moon made up the difference. I didn't want to stop to make any adjustments now. Kami continued his fast pace. The team from the Dominican Republic was in the lead breaking trail in the fresh snow. Mirjam and I, with Minga and Kami, were just behind.

The weather forecast had played another role behind the scenes. Now high winds were forecasted for the next day; the afternoon of our summit. So the Sherpas had been told to push hard to get up and down before the winds arrived. And they were doing their job well. But not every climber/Sherpa team was following the same script.

The winds picked back up. I thought about continuing without my goggles because wearing them combined with the oxygen mask blocked my view of my feet making me go slower. But seeing climbers return with frozen corneas caused me to put them on; and they never came off the rest of the summit push. In spite of caution that gloves were better than mittens and more nimble with the jumars and carabiners, I found my Black Diamond Mercury Mitts kept me warm and allowed me to clip in and out with ease. So with these along with my down suit, I was comfortable as the winds gusted.

We climbed steadily towards the Balcony. I was anticipating 6 hours to reach it similar to my previous times. Each time I tired a bit, I found I had strayed from the basic mechanics of climbing. Each step had to be efficient; no slipping or stumbling, each breath full of oxygen; no gasping; each clip efficient; no wasted motion. I focused on the mechanics to the exclusion of any other thoughts.

The climb seemed long in the cold and dark. But I knew we were making good progress as we passed many climbers, some standing in place. I knew the feeling. I passed the large rock marking where I turned back before; I just smiled inside as I focused on my mechanics. And then the route crested; I saw headlamps still instead of moving. We had reached the Balcony. I took my pack off so Kami could swap oxygen bottles according to plan. I looked around in the dark and then to my watch, it was 1:00 AM. We had left at 9:20 making our time an amazing 3:40 - for me.

I told Kami and he shrugged and said it was not fast or slow. I smiled at his Sherpa honesty. But he was in no mood to chat, focusing on swapping the bottle out quickly. I took a drink of hot tea from my thermos and glanced to my right. The South Summit and the Southeast Ridge dominated the view, even in the dark. The true summit of Everest still hidden. The South Summit appeared sharp, high and very far away. Doubts entered my mind again. Kami left for the Ridge, following Minga and Mirjam. I followed quickly. The four of us set a steady pace; Minga breaking trail in the fresh snow.

The first section was a gentle slope but also where a Japanese climber had recently died. His body was still along the route but out of view. I focused on my mechanics. Kami suddenly set a swift pace again and I felt the distance between us growing. I stepped up my own pace but soon felt my breathing getting labored. I caught up with Kami and ask that he slow down a bit. I saw a break in the skyline above. Soon it was obvious that the route had taken a sudden and sharp uptick. The angle went from easy to difficult in a span of a few feet. But there was more, exposed rock slabs dominated the route and the fixed line went straight up. I knew about the slabs but the severity, angle, and height surprised me. Kami slowed down significantly due to the conditions. I was now keeping up and mimicked his every step. But my blocked vision caused me to take short, simple steps trusting the points of my crampons on the smooth rock. This

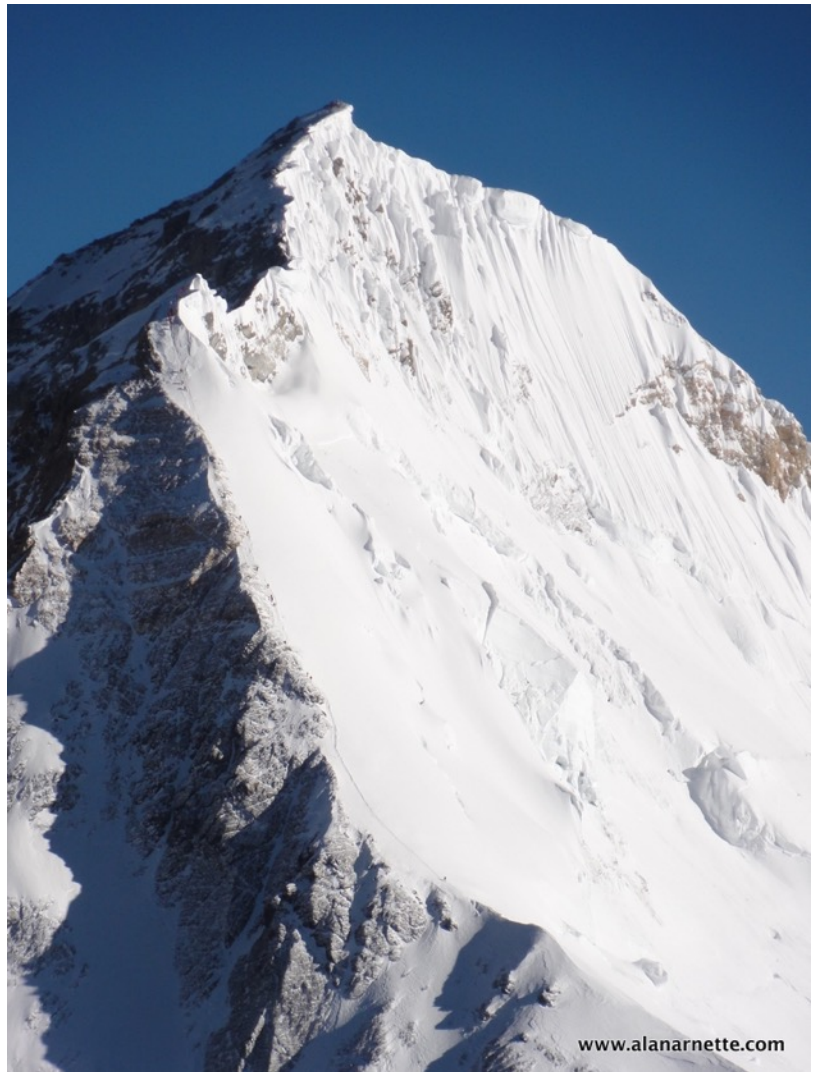
section took longer than I thought. We were now above 28,000', a new personal record for me. Each step required focus and concentration. I took a short break. The view was stunning in the waning moonlight. Makalu, the fifth highest mountain in the world at 27,838', was to the east. Lhotse, the fourth highest peak at 27,890' to the south. And Cho Oyu at 26,907', the sixth highest to the east. I was higher than any of these peaks.

I looked back to the east wondering when the sun would rise. For the first time I considered the possibility we might summit in the dark. Finally we reached the end of the slabs but now the angle increased even more, the final slope to the South Summit was very steep. It was a short section and arriving at the South Summit at 3:00 AM, I knew I would make the true summit. But another view for which I was unprepared appeared; looking at the actual summit of Mt. Everest. It was high, steep, and sharp. Two more features needed to be covered before getting there however, the Cornice Traverse and the Hillary Step.

The route went down about 50 feet, I arm wrapped this section to a flat section. Here we swapped oxygen bottles again. In discussions with Eric Simonson as long ago as two years, I had told him of hitting the wall at the Balcony. He suggested I use extra

oxygen and climb from the South Col at 4 lpm instead of 3. But this required carrying an extra bottle to the South Summit, an extra fee for a second Sherpa. I immediately liked this plan and agreed. Karma Rita Sherpa carried my extra bottle and was now helping Kami swap it out. But there was a problem. The twisting valve of the regulator that controls the oxygen flow had frozen shut. While the Sherpas were carrying an extra regulator, they worked to fix mine. After fifteen minutes they succeeded. I hoisted my pack which weighed about 20 pounds on my back and continued the climb. I had been worried about this weight but never found it to be a problem; in fact I almost never noticed it all.

The weather kicked up. The winds had been somewhat calm most of the night. In a moment of irony, I had wished for a slight breeze since I was actually getting warm and



slightly sweating in my down suit. But now as we crested the South Summit, we were directly exposed to the prevailing winds from the west and they were blowing steadily at over 30 mph. I pulled my hood up again and adjusted my goggles.

The route was flat through this section and suddenly I realized I was on the Cornice Traverse. This section was often feared by those with vertigo given it dropped 11,000' into Tibet on the Kangshung Face and 8,000' on Everest's Southwest Face to Nepal on the left. Oh and it was about 2 to 3 feet wide. Even though there was a fixed rope to stay clipped into, it was one section I thought I would notice; but as I walked across, I barely acknowledged the danger.

A short rock climb followed and for a moment I thought it was the Hillary Step, but soon came upon this famous feature. Named after Sir Edmond Hillary, it is a 40' high rock feature that creates massive bottlenecks and traffic jams if the route is crowded. There were fixed ropes set by the Sherpa team on May 5th plus a few old lines. I clipped into the newest lines and attached my jumar. The jumar was key because it will automatically lock sharp teeth into the rope if I slip preventing me from falling too far. There was snow on the Step but a lot of exposed rock. I had watched Kami climb it so I had a general idea of foot placement but again my visibility was blocked by the goggles and mask. So I gingerly placed my right foot onto a small rock outcropping and then my left in a classic stem move. I pushed up with my legs and pulled on the ropes with the jumar. I repeated this move a few times and soon stood at the top of the Hillary Step. I was pleased that it went so smoothly.

Yet another surprise was waiting at the top of the Step, a large rock boulder blocked the route on to the summit. A vertical rock wall was on the right and several thousand feet of clear air to the left. Kami and Karma Rita waited for me and made sure I was clipped in as I straddled the rock and scooted over it. My breathing increased. I still could not see the summit but followed Kami as he lead the route. I was expecting a nice easy path to the top but found more small bumps on uneven snow.

It was about 4:30 AM and the first hint of dawn was showing in the east. I looked up from my feet to take in the view and saw a series of 20' high cornices to my right marking the eastern edge of the summit ridge. It was a sight locked in my memory forever. These wind blown snow sculptures curled with grace, their edges smooth and lightly illuminated by the soft rays of a new day. I looked to the east and saw the perfect pyramid shadow of Everest projected into Nepal. I silently wished for my camera but it was deep inside my down suit and we were moving fast now towards the summit.

I focused on the mechanics of climbing. One step, a second and then a third. Short, simple steps. Breath evenly. I looked up and saw a prayer flag - the summit of Mount Everest. This was going to work.

I had expected to be emotional at this point as I had dreamed of this moment for almost ten years, but the seriousness of the moment occupied my mind. The wind was now blowing at over 40 mph and it was cold, probably 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit.

While I was warm, I knew that when I stopped the possibility of getting cold and even frostbite was real in these conditions. I silently hoped the sun would keep me warm but knew it was still too early.

Mirjam and Minga were slightly ahead of Kami and me as we approached the summit. I had no idea where the rest of our team was on the climb; if they had turned back or were continuing. I was tired, the pace had taken a toll on me. We had left at 9:20 PM on May 20 and it was now 4:55 AM, May 21 - I had climbed from the South Col to the summit in 7:40. I had planned on 12.

I took the final steps to the summit and saw a bench carved out the snow just beneath a collection of prayer flags. I saw Mirjam and Minga and three other climbers already on the summit. They had climbed from the north side and were the first of the season from Tibet. Knowing our time was limited due to the current and impending weather, again I focused on mechanics. I unzipped my down suit and took out my satellite phone. I wanted to call Cathy and post an audio dispatch on my website.

As I spoke with Cathy, my emotional wall collapsed. I could barely get the words out as we shared the summit separated by thousands of miles. She had supported me unconditionally for over 30 major expeditions. We had planned my climbs, shared in the successes and cried together. This was her summit as much as mine.



Another button called a blogging service to record a message for my Blog. I had to enter the 9 digit ID code and took off my mitten. Immediately, I felt my finger tips go from slightly cold to a tingling freeze. But knew what I wanted to say. "I want to dedicate this summit to my mom and to all the Alzheimer's moms. We love you and miss you." The emotion was strong. I had more to say but could not go on.

Kami had taken my camera and was clicking pictures as I made my calls. Karma Rita pulled several banners out of my pack, including Flat Stanley given to me from a school in Florida. I tried to hold them steady in the high winds. With the tasks completed, my shoulders slumped as I put my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands. My down hood covered my face. I sobbed silently, celebrating the summit and grieving my mom. I thought about my 7 Summits project, all the supporters, all the followers; all the people who believed in me. The feelings were overwhelming.

Kami and Karma Rita stood by quietly giving me room. The wind gusted and I started to get cold. Time to leave. I stood up and looked from top of the world for the first time. I stood silent and still. I pulled my goggles up to have a clear view. The eastern horizon was now a long line of soft golden light. The sun was revealing the nearby summits, mountain valleys and glaciers. I looked north into Tibet, west and south to Nepal. The summits had the spotlight of the morning sun casting shadows to the west. There were no higher mountains, no higher spots on earth. I was a tiny spec, it was humbling.

Leaving the Top of the World

I looked at Kami and nodded as we took the first steps down. Quickly we reached the Hillary Step. I wrapped my arm around the fixed rope and placed my feet on the rocks as I down climbed. I took a deep breath but the oxygen masked collapsed against my face. I knew what was happening, the intake or exhaust plastic valve had been blocked by ice. If it was not cleared the oxygen would not flow. Kami was watching me and I patted my mask to get his attention. As I reached the bottom of the Step, I pulled my mask down and said "I can't breathe". He immediately closed his hand into a fist and hit the base of my mask until the blockage was removed. I felt the oxygen flow again.

We crossed the Cornice Traverse but I have zero memory of it. We re-climbed to the top of the South Summit. At the summit, I saw maybe 30 climbers in various states climbing higher. The wind had stopped completely. I saw the slabs and wondered if I should rappel using my figure 8 device or arm wrap. Climbers were standing at awkward angles on them trying to catch their breath or waiting for someone ahead to move on. A bottleneck was developing. I was now glad that we had pushed our pace.

I passed several members of our Classic team just below the South Summit. I tried to give them a few words of encouragement but they just looked at me. Later, they said they didn't remember me at all. The slabs were steeper, smoother, and slicker than I remembered going up. So I held the fixed line tightly hoping the anchors were solid with so many people putting their full weight on them. We made our way down to the final, more gradual section of the Southeast Ridge and onto the Balcony. I joined Mirjam and Karim (the first Dominican to summit Everest), who had joined us on the summit and left before I had. My oxygen bottle, swapped at the South Summit, still had enough to reach the South Col. I was very tired.

Climbing down the Triangular Face, I saw my big rock and again smiled inside. This had worked. I used a combination of arm wrapping and rappelling as I made my way down. Kami, never far away. I reached the South Col, 3:20 after summiting; not fast, not slow :). IMG had asked that unless someone was hurt, we should continue to Camp 2 which required descending the Lhotse Face. The concern was the high winds that were supposed to develop in a few hours.

I collapsed in my tent, spent, totally empty both physically and emotionally. I called Cathy but believed she knew where I was given the GPS tracker. I fell asleep knowing I would continue to Camp 2. I drank a liter of water, only my 2nd since I left for the summit and ate a few bits of chocolate; my first food in 12 hours. Two hours later, Kami and I left for the safety of the lower camp. I was still using oxygen but at a lower flow. The down climb on the Lhotse Face was long and tiring. My body was exhausted, walking in slow motion probably frustrating Kami. We arrived at camp late in the day, around 5, on May 21st.

We left the next morning for Base Camp, navigating the Khumbu Icefall for the last time. Six IMG clients and their Sherpas had summited on May 21st making the total for the 2011 season 37. Back in Base Camp, the Sherpas had already started breaking it down preparing to leave for Lukla and Kathmandu. The time for celebrating was brief.

I walked out with two teammates, Jay and Mirjam who

were married at the 17K camp on Denali. We stopped at Lama Geshi's house to thank him for the blessing he gave us on the trip in. He suffered a stroke almost a year ago and I was very pleased to see him back to his old self. I had visited him on almost every one of my Himalayan climbs.



Back in Kathmandu, we made the trip to the Rum Doodle where we showed proof from the Ministry of Tourism that we had summited (a press release) and then signed our names to the white board along with many other summiters. A milestone.

Memories Are Everything

My tagline for the 7 Summit Climb for Alzheimer's is Memories are Everything. And that they are. Even in my oxygen deprived state on the summit, my mind was clear with memories of my purpose and goals. It was filled with the good wishes, prayers and thoughts from people all over the world.

Many had followed my site for years and were disappointed along with me during my previous Everest attempts. They cried along with me as I wrote of what Alzheimer's was doing to my mom. They wrote to me about their own experiences.

Memories are everything but making them is what life is all about. Standing on the summit of Mt. Everest was an important moment in my life, no question. I am grateful to so many people for helping me get there. And ...

Please consider supporting an Alzheimer's cause: 100% for research through the Cure Alzheimer's Fund or family caregivers through the National Family Caregivers Association. All of your donations go directly to these causes and nothing ever to me thanks to the support from the Alzheimer's Immunotherapy Program of Janssen AI and Pfizer.

Memories of life - family, adventures and summits.

Climb On!

Alan

Memories are Everything