



A NIGHT ON

EVEREST



BY DR. BRUCE R. TERRY, EDITOR EMERITUS

ST

"It's 5 p.m. on May 22 and I am struggling to get ready to climb to the summit of Everest. Our guide, Harry, had told us to be resting and/or preparing to leave in two hours. There was chatter on the radios. It was blowing snow sideways with winds gusting over 30 mph.

I have just taken off my GPS watch to put back on over the sleeve of my down suit and I can't find it. I ask Huey, who is one of three people in my tent, if he has seen my watch and he shakes his head no. He is wearing an oxygen mask like me and Chris, my other tentmate. We are at Everest Camp 4, elevation 26000 ft.

THE 'DEATH ZONE.' HOW DID I GET HERE?

I remember that in 2003 my wife, Susan, read an article in Outside magazine about a regular guy who climbed Mt. Rainier. He described his experience as a personal 'suffer fest.' My wife, knowing that I like the outdoors, camping and backpacking, came to me and said, 'Happy Birthday, you'll hate this!' The next year I did climb Mt. Rainier and I did have a new experience in mountaineering - new gear, new techniques and lessons in traveling on snow and ice. I was addicted. My two children were younger then, but I remember my wife saying that I could climb other mountains, but not Everest because it was simply too dangerous."

I arrived at Camp 4 around 11:00 a.m. after a 6:00 a.m. start from Camp 3. I was still processing the one dead body that I had seen just off the main route above the Yellow Band four hours earlier. How long had they been there? Who was that? I wanted answers then, but I was just trying to keep moving at over 25,000 ft. I was climbing with an 18 lb. bottle of oxygen with a three liter per minute flow rate. I was more worried about leaving for the summit after what I had just seen.

We crossed the Geneva Spur at around 10:00 a.m. and made our way to the South Col and Camp 4. Climbers were descending from the first of the two good summit days of the 2019 season. It was May 22. It was partly cloudy and windy. Half of my IMG (International Mountain Guides) group had already summited and were either descending or resting at Camp 4 while my group was just getting into Camp 4. I wanted to hear about the climb and what had happened, but those descending from the summit were either crashed and asleep or not back down from the summit. I was also exhausted and happy to crawl into my temporary tent and unstuff my sleeping bag and sleeping pad. While I was resting, Chris arrived and joined me in the tent. We could hear talking on the nearby radios that our Sherpa and guides shared. On the radio we could hear one of our team asking for help. She was on the Balcony, about half way down from the summit, and she was not feeling well. She was told to get something to eat and drink and then continue down. We had no idea that she had symptoms of pulmonary edema on the Hillary Step. Chris and I were on oxygen at one liter per minute while inside our tent. The idea of pulmonary edema scared me.





Huey came into our tent around 3:00 p.m. We learned that he was suffering from altitude issues. He was cognitively impaired and exhausted. An hour earlier he had stopped on the Geneva Spur, just 15 minutes from Camp 4 and wouldn't move. Funuru (our Sherpa manager) and Harry (our IMG guide) talked to his Sherpa and eventually got him going again.

Now in our tent, he was being questioned by our guide, Harry. They cranked up his oxygen from 1 liter per minute while resting to 10 liters per minute. I was in charge of forcing him to drink while

hand-feeding him peanut M&M's. He didn't speak for first hour after arriving at our tent.

My Sherpa, Pega, came by our tent to help me prepare my backpack with a new oxygen tank. We talked about what I needed to bring. Another Sherpa, Dawa, refilled my two water bottles. I used one bottle to make Ramen noodles. I was checking the pockets of my down suit to make sure I had my rescue medications in my right chest pocket. At basecamp we had labeled our Diamox, Dexamethasone and Nifedipine by color.

Greg, our camp manager, recorded where we would keep these medications. If our Sherpa or another teammate needed to give us medication, Greg could ask someone over the radio to help. Diamox was for altitude sickness issues, Dexamethasone for cerebral edema and Nifedipine was for pulmonary edema.

After I reviewed the items I needed for the summit I needed to go to the bathroom, so I removed my oxygen mask and went outside. The wind was blowing snow sideways. I asked Harry where to go and he pointed to an area behind our tents. Camp 4 looked like a scene out of a zombie apocalypse. Trash all over the place – old propane tanks, cans, bottles, shredded tents, broken tent poles and human waste. I found a mostly barren area of rock and old tin cans and with my down suit down around my ankles I added another pile to Camp 4. I was gone just long enough to feel the effects of no supplemental oxygen at 26,000 ft. I hurried back to my tent, but wearing just my outside boot liners to save time made me wobblier.

Back in my tent I was now inserting the heated boot liners in the internal boots and running the wire up through the legs of my down suit and connecting it to the batteries that I had on both the left and right inside pockets. With my boots on I was nearly ready to go.

Chris was putting drink mix into his Nalgene. Huey was still deciding if he was going to go to the summit at all. He was feeling better, but because he was so exhausted getting to Camp 4, going up was a big risk. I quickly added another top layer just in case! I then added my energy powder, UCAN, that I had discovered months earlier at my gym, to one thermos. I had been using it every time we had a big day of climbing.

A NIGHT ON EVEREST

I also used some hot water to have another cup of Ramen. I was double-checking my pockets, boots and headlamp when Pega came to the tent and said, "Let's go."

I still hadn't found my watch, but I assumed it was 7:30 p.m. I said my farewells to Huey. He had decided that he would leave in an hour and go as high as he could comfortably and return when needed. Chris was right behind me. As I was leaving the tent, Chris's Sherpa came to get him to leave our tent.

Once outside I noticed that the winds had died down. It was dark and there was a light snow, but otherwise the air was calm. With my headlamp on I secured my crampons. As usual, Pega double checked. We did a quick check of items that I needed to have on me. I left the tent and my partial bottle of oxygen. I brought my mask outside, but it was five minutes or more before Pega helped me with my backpack and connected my mask to the new full bottle inside my pack. I stood there and could feel a warm comfortable feeling as the oxygen entered my brain, muscles and other tissues in my body.

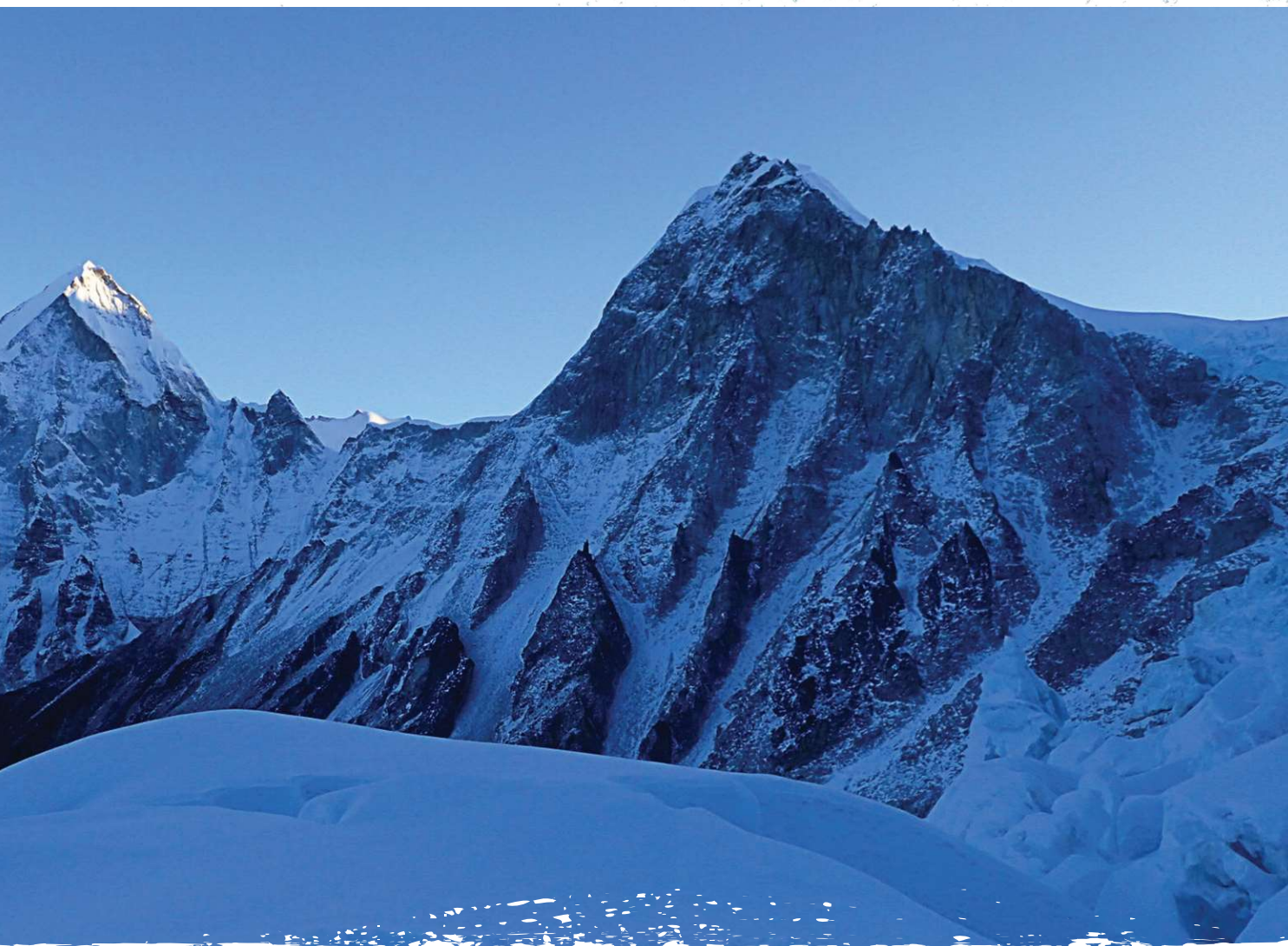
Around me were my teammates in different states of readiness. Beyond them were other teams getting ready. Looking up at the triangle face that leads climbers to the summit out of Camp 4, I could see about a dozen headlamps of those that had already started for the summit. As I was getting ready to leave Camp 4, Harry came over and said, "You have this!" Funuru was also nearby and said, "I know you can do this!" And with that, Pega, Dawa and I left Camp 4, headlamps on, oxygen on.

As we left Camp 4, I again noticed how calm the night air was after such a blustery day. Because I was focused on my own status, I had not seen who was ahead or behind me other than Pega in front and Dawa behind me. Dawa was carrying an extra bottle of oxygen for me to use when I arrived at the South Summit. I had arranged with IMG when I signed up in October to have an extra bottle of oxygen. I didn't know that it would follow me to the South Summit until that day, but it made sense that no one would go to the South Summit early just to leave oxygen. Cost: \$6,000.

We walked into the night. Nobody was talking, everything was so quiet. The first part of the climb out of Camp 4 is pretty flat. Quickly that changes and it gets very steep. I had seen that earlier in the day and worried that it would be hard. Now that I was on the Triangle Face, I felt good. The pace was perfect with the three liters-per-minute of oxygen I was getting. Because I couldn't find my watch before I left my tent, I now had no idea what time it was. Maybe that was better.

As the slope got steeper I could see that a group ahead of us had stopped. As we approached, I could see two climbers in down suits above another climber. The two had ropes and were basically lowering the third person down the mountain. With the darkness, oxygen mask and goggles, I couldn't tell what was wrong with the injured climber. He was on the ground sliding down the steep slope, not moving. Was he/she conscious or unconscious? Was he/she dead or alive? As they passed by us, the group ahead began to move and so did we. Fifteen minutes later the same thing happened again - a climber was being lowered down the mountain as we continued up.





A NIGHT ON EVEREST

This climber was lifeless, as I now believe the other was. And then, just minutes later, another motionless climber was lowered down by multiple Sherpa. Pega and I continued climbing, not saying a word.

After a while of steep terrain, it became rocky as well. That just compounded the difficulty and slowed us down. It also jacked my heart rate as I tried to move over rocks. When it's just ice, even steep ice, it's easier to just move smoothly up. Take two steps, slide the ascender and then repeat. With rocks, it's a large step up, pull on the ascender, one or two steps, pull on the ascender, take another large step or two, pull on the ascender. It's more disruptive and more physical.

Luckily, the rocky area ended, and we were back on plain old steep ice, with a light snow covering. Ahead of me I could see the glow of other climbers' headlamps. I was trying to see where

the Balcony was. We would stop there and swap out my oxygen tank for a fresh bottle and I would get a break. Nobody behind or in front of me was talking. Because I didn't have my watch, I couldn't tell if we had been climbing two hours or four hours. Each time it would look like we were coming to a crest, I would expect to be at the Balcony. Each time it would be a false landing and the climb would continue in silence. I knew I was supposed to eat and drink, but there was nowhere to stop. I decided to pull out an Espresso Cliff Shot, rip it open and squeeze the contents into my mouth. At least that's what I intended to do. What really occurred was that I had trouble opening the Shot pack because I wasn't willing to take off my mitten liners. When I couldn't open the pack with my hands, I resorted to tearing it with my teeth. I was able to get a small opening and attempted to squeeze it in my mouth while we

were still moving uphill. Because the climbers ahead would take a few steps and then stop, those of us behind would do the same. I thought that I could suck down the Cliff Shot when we paused. I didn't get much in my mouth, but I did notice that I had more on my gloves and on the outside of the package. I managed to put the sticky pack into my right outside breast pocket. I would realize later that I also had my camera and emergency medicine in that pocket. I had a similar problem when I climbed Cho Oyu. The result was a sticky mess all over my camera. I concluded later that no matter how hard I tried to plan I was still stupid at altitude.

We passed more climbers that had stopped as we did earlier in the night. I could not tell if they were done with their summit attempt or if they were resting. We kept moving.



Pega turned around and asked how I was doing. With my lobster claw heavy black mittens, the right covered with a sticky mess of Espresso Cliff Shot, I attempted to give a thumbs up. When my thumb did not point up, I spoke and said I was doing fine. The next words he spoke surprised me. He said that the Balcony was just ahead and we would be resting shortly. I asked him what time it was, and he must not have heard because there was no answer.

As we approached the Balcony, I could see a dozen or more headlamps that seemed to be motionless. Other headlamps were moving about, but none in a straight line. As we got closer, I could see a flat area. Some headlamps were moving in a straight line to the left and above us. I had figured out that our route turned to the left as the South East Ridge began.

Pega pointed to a spot ahead and to the right. He told me to have a seat. I unclipped my backpack and set it

down, careful not to tangle my oxygen tubing or mask. I pulled out my water bottle and drank my mix of UCAN powder and water. Unfortunately, when you mix the powder with warm water it clumps, so, I was drinking lumpy water. I didn't care, but it was an experience. At the same time, I pulled a package of candied pecans that I had saved for the summit and choked down a few small handfuls before putting them back into the inside middle pocket of my down suit where I kept my foot warmer batteries. I checked the battery in that pocket, and it had one light on for power. I couldn't tell if they were working because my feet were not warm, but at the same time they were not cold. I guessed they were working.

While I rested, Pega and Dawa switched my oxygen tank for a fresh tank that had been brought up a week earlier by our Sherpa. I asked Pega again what time it was, and

I could not understand his response. I saw Justin, one of our guides and personal guide to another climber. He asked me how I was doing, and I replied, "Very well." I asked him what time it was, and he told me it was 11:30 p.m. It had taken us four hours to get to the Balcony. We were ahead of schedule. After the oxygen bottle was switched out Pega asked if I was ready to go and I said, "Yes."

We left the flat landing of the Balcony and began climbing the steep South East Ridge. As we began to climb, I was aware that we were walking on a narrow ridge with a long drop both to the left and the right. I was glad it was dark. I don't think I would have liked to see how steep it was and decided that I would worry about that on the way down when the views would be better, or worse! I could see some headlamps ahead in the distance. They seemed very high. We still had some serious climbing to go.







The Ridge was exposed, but the terrain was snow and ice and not much rock. I liked that better. Again, I was in the "zone." Not the "Death Zone," although I was, but in the groove of climbing. I believed that I was more than halfway to the summit, and I began to think that I was really climbing Everest. On every climb I have ever been on I get weepy as I get close to the summit. It's pure joy that creates those moments and this was no different. While everyone was moving one step at a time, I was getting teary-eyed as I thought about the summit. In those moments it's a flash of emotion and memories. The months of training, picturing my wife and children, my mother and deceased father, my sisters, the dogs that covered so many miles with me over the years, my time at the gym and on the bike with my friends, all of the other mountains that I have climbed. What an incredible feeling of joy. People ask why I climb mountains and I suppose that it's that feeling that keeps me coming back for more.

We continued on, and as earlier the climb was very steep. Intermittently we would get to a small flat area and then it would return to the original steepness. I had no idea of the time, but I also didn't know the altitude. My watch would have given me that information had I had it on. I did have my In Reach on and sending a location out to my loved ones every 30 minutes. It has altitude and GPS location information, but I was not able to use it because I had heavy mitts that I was not willing to remove. I didn't know it at the time, but my wife and others were watching my In Reach posts to track my ascent of the summit. Because they had no verbal information, they would get worried if I didn't change position every 30 minutes or if I appeared to be down climbing prior to reaching the summit. I would learn later, after speaking with

my wife, that when I had a short decent from the South summit to the Hillary Step, the GPS showed me coming down. My wife thought that I had abandoned the summit. I had my family on pins and needles.

Pega was in front and then Dawa behind. We continued up in the still darkness. Every once in a while I would get a glimpse of a few headlamps ahead and above. They would appear and disappear as the terrain offered a glimpse of the next peak. The South East Ridge is a spine on the side of Everest. If you look at an aerial view you would think it crazy and dangerous to climb here, but in the dark it seemed safer.

I turned around at one point to see the traffic behind us. We had separated ourselves from the next group by about 100 feet. In the sky behind, the clouds were breaking up and a red-brown moon was peeking through. Way in the distance the clouds below us were flashing white with lightning. A little bit of nighttime light was giving the South Summit an outline. I was getting closer and the feeling of success was getting stronger. I still was not ready to commit to that feeling. Call it superstition or just plain common sense. Things could still go wrong.

Almost immediately things did go wrong for someone. A dead body was on the ridge, face down. It was still dark. I couldn't tell how long it had been there. Another hundred yards ahead there was another body on the fixed lines. This one was at an anchor. Every climber had to brush past this person to unclip and clip back on to the fixed line above the anchor. I would learn later that both had died the day before and, combined with the others that I saw being lowered down the mountain early in the evening, it would make 11 lives lost by the end of the climbing season the following week.

Eight lives would be lost in just two night of climbing. It would be the most deaths since the earthquake in 2015, and the most deaths in several years from the summit attempt alone. At the time I looked and then kept on climbing. I thought about these individuals and what might have gone wrong. I said a prayer to myself, but what else could I have done?

We reached the South Summit in the dark. Was I going to reach the true Everest Summit in the dark and miss all the views? At the South Summit we could see the summit traverse to the top of the world, a scary ribbon of snow and ice that leads to the Hillary Step. I was told that if you fell to your right you would land 12,000 feet below in Tibet. If you fell to your left you would fall 12,000 feet below to Nepal.

THE ADVICE I WAS GIVEN WAS, "DON'T FALL!"

The path descends steeply for about 100 ft. At the ledge before you begin the traverse we stopped. Dawa Tensing, the Sherpa behind me, pulled out the partial oxygen tank from my backpack and replaced it with a fresh oxygen tank that he had been carrying since Camp 4. He cached the half-full tank on the ledge by tying it into an ice screw he twisted into the ice. While he was making the switch, I finished my bottle of lumpy water and drink mix. I ate another Cliff Shot. This time I got more into my mouth, but it was still a sticky mess. I estimate that I had been climbing for eight hours in the "Death Zone." I had drunk one liter of water and consumed about 350 calories. Not really enough. I put the empty package into my right outside pocket with the other sticky one.

Daylight was just beginning to our right. The dark sky was getting hints of purple and the traverse was coming into better focus. Ahead was the Hillary Step and the Everest Summit. I didn't want to get too excited, but I might actually get to the summit. I walked along the narrow traverse and for the very first time I was scared. There was really nothing to hold onto and it was icy. I moved along with Pega in front and Dawa behind me. The traverse went up and down and right and left just enough to make it more difficult. At one spot another body was tangled in lines just below on the Nepal side. This climber was dangling between two ropes like a pair of shoes hanging off powerlines. Did he slip? Why didn't he get back on the line? Was someone there to help? Did others ignore him? Did I ignore him? He was perfectly still. How horrible would it be to see others walk past you and nobody offer to help? Could I have done more? Could he still have been alive when we passed him? He was dangling below us and there was no safe way I knew to get him up. Was I just telling myself that nothing could be done?

I was now staring directly at the Hillary Step as it was getting lighter. The Step changed in 2017 when a large portion of rock cleaved off the left face. The path was no longer along the rock wall, but straight up the ridge line and more exposed. I was almost there. Each crest could be the summit or just another bump along the way. Each crest would be a disappointment to me as each would not be the actual summit. Pega turned around and told me 10 to 15 minutes more. My heart started to pound. I became teary-eyed again. Another false summit and another. Then the instant we crested the next rise I could see prayer flags and a few people gathering.

There it was at 29,029 ft. ...the summit of Everest! Pega turned to me and said, "You did it!" and "Good job, Bruce." Dawa gave me a giant smile. I just wanted to get there and sit down.

We approached the prayer flags and the small crowd of about 15 people. The high point of the summit was behind the flags. It was just a foot or two higher, but too many people were there for us to squeeze in. I looked over the side to the North and I could see climbers from the Tibetan side making their way to the same summit. I could climb back down the Tibetan side, but I would be arrested and I wouldn't have any of my gear or my passport. I would end up in a Chinese jail for a long time.

I sat down along the edge of the summit with Tibet behind me. Pega said, "Let's get some pictures." I opened my right outside pocket to get my camera and realized that I had put two used gel packets in with my camera. I now had sticky gel on my camera. I laughed to myself because this was exactly what I had done on Cho Oyu, and I had planned all my pockets carefully so it wouldn't happen here. Lack of oxygen makes you stupid for sure.

I used my down suit to wipe off my camera. The lens was clean and that was all I cared about. Pega stood a few feet away as I removed three banners from my pack. It was not very windy, but just enough to prevent me from holding the banners out without each folding over itself. The first banner was going to be a surprise for my family. I had it made in secret, and it read, **"Everest 2019 Susan, Caroline and Henry, you are in my heart and my strength, Thank you for helping me reach the summit."**



The next banner was an Eagle Scout Explorer banner. Both were held up and waved in the wind. Each time I waited and asked Pega if everything looked good, and each time, he said yes. The last banner was for my Boy Scout Troop, Troop 181 Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, of which I am Scoutmaster. I held out the banner and asked Pega if it looked good and he said yes. When I looked at the photo later, I realized that it was backwards. Altitude makes you stupid!

I hugged my teammates who were on the summit with me. It was probably no more than 15 minutes later that Pega said we should get going. It was getting more crowded. I never removed my mask even though my backpack was off and next to me. I did take a drink and eat some candied pecans before I had Pega help me get my backpack on.

In an instant it was over. I had made it to the summit of Everest and now it was time to descend. Many accidents happen on the descent. Climbers can expend all their energy to get to the summit and run on adrenaline rather than food. After they leave the summit their bodies "bonk" like a marathoner with two miles to go. In 2011 I helped a 20-year-old man from S. Africa descend from Mt. Elbrus in Russia.

He was passing out and acting drunk. We gave him some candy, but he never really felt normal. It took three of us to hold him as we climbed down from the summit. While the terrain allowed us to get this young man down on Elbrus, it wouldn't work on Everest. In 2012, while on Aconcagua, a woman with our group had similar symptoms of confusion and lack of motor control consistent with altitude sickness or low blood sugar. She was fine on the summit, but as we began to descend, she collapsed. We helped her down as well. I added her backpack to mine as we descended. Again, this would not have been possible on Everest. The route from the North Summit to the South Summit was too steep and narrow to allow three people across. There were also steep ups and downs and one rope. That is why the unfortunate are often left on the mountain.

I still didn't know what time it was. I think someone told me that we made the summit around 5:30 a.m. As we left the summit there was little traffic coming toward us. We traveled quickly toward the top of the Hillary Step. When we arrived, we could see many more people on their way up. We now were clipping and unclipping from the fixed rope as we passed those coming up.

The fixed rope was our lifeline. If connected you were safe, but unconnected you could fall more than 12,000 ft. When you and another climber meet, one must unclip their safety line from their harness and then reconnect after they pass. The pass must be done with care. Because both of us are wearing backpacks and bulky down suits we must face each other and hug or do what I called "Everest Dirty Dancing" as we passed. If you were unclipped, you would hold the person passing very tightly. This could go on for twenty or more people, making the process very slow.



At the top of the Hillary Step we waited to let several climbers pass. It was a safe place to wait. When our turn came, we dropped down along the traverse and moved until we met with the next group coming up. They congratulated me and the others descending and we encouraged them as they approached the summit. The feeling was friendly and we were all helping each other. It was not as bad as the news would portray the next day, nor was it as crowded. Sadly, that was where I saw the last body on the climb up. It was now light and it was easier to see. The dead climber was twisted in some ropes about five feet below us on our right. I still didn't know when this person died. I couldn't see a face and I couldn't tell anything by the clothing.

I was ascending the last of the summit traverse back to the top of the South Summit. We had descended the traverse, now we needed to ascend to the top of the South East Ridge. It was exponentially harder to climb up again and through a tricky section that had only one fixed rope. A ladder would have been better, but who was going to bring that up? It took me a few minutes to figure out how to climb and where to step. Pega was ahead and had already climbed over, and now it was my turn. I wished he would pop his head back and reach out to grab my hand or pull me up. Instead, I had to do it on my own. I did manage, and honestly, I was impressed with myself. Yes, I had just summited Mt. Everest, but I had so much help along the way. This was a test, not intentionally, but a test. I'm a mountaineer. I can do this!

When I finally caught up to Pega I asked, "What gives? Where were you," and his answer, "I had to pee."

We continued down the South East Ridge. The sky was partly cloudy. My goggles were completely iced over, so I removed them and was climbing with no eyewear. I was very worried

about snow blindness, but I hoped for the best. As we descended the ridge, I got a much better look at the steep and exposed edge we had climbed several hours earlier.

CLIMBING DOWN IS NOT EASIER.

You are tired and it's hard on your legs and feet with your toes crushing at the front of your boots. We passed the body that was fallen at an anchor for the fixed lines. I thought about what had happened. Was it exhaustion, or altitude issues (cerebral edema or pulmonary edema)? Where was his Sherpa and his team? Was he from this season or past seasons?

We continued down and came to a tricky section with rock. We were stuck for maybe 20 minutes while several teams were coming up. I saw Brad from my last trip on Cho Oyu. He climbed last fall with me to prepare for Everest. He developed bronchitis and never went to the summit of Cho Oyu. He was signed up with another expedition company for this expedition. Now he was near the summit traverse. He noticed me as he passed. How he knew it was me in my down suit and completely covered amazed me. We hugged and congratulated each other. He would be on the summit soon.

Eventually we arrived back at the Balcony. We stopped and switched oxygen tanks again. I realized that I had made the correct decision to have extra oxygen. With the reported crowds and delays from the day before, I didn't want to worry that I would run out of O's. With the feeling of accomplishment to be back at the Balcony safe I ate and drank. I had eaten all my gel shots and now I choked down a Cliff Bar and some more chunky water.

We rested for a while. The Sherpas were talking and joking. We all knew we had accomplished what we set out to do. After two months we were coming down for the last time. Climbers would be going home as well as the Sherpa. Many of the Sherpa live down valley from Everest Base Camp. Once their responsibilities were over they would hike one to three days to their home village. Some would help in their villages and homes until the fall climbing season or next spring. Some, like our head Sherpa Funuru, would leave for Africa where he guides trips on Kilimanjaro for the summer.

The mood was calm and peaceful. For the first time in weeks I had no anxiety, no illness. I wasn't tired, I was just thinking about going home. I was on the Balcony, the flat area between the South East Ridge and the Triangular Face when it occurred to me that it was May 23. It was the anniversary of my father's passing. While I was getting ready to continue down the Triangular Face back to Camp 4, I was thinking about my father. Would he have approved of my decision to climb Everest? He was aware of my climbing before his passing, but I had climbed so much more since. I think he would have reluctantly let me climb. He would have worried like any parent of a child, and he would have told me that I had too much to lose and asked me why did I have to do it. I spoke to him that morning. I told him climbing Everest was dangerous, but I had taken all the proper precautions to make it as safe as possible. I told him that I hope he knew how much I missed him and how I tell everyone how great a role model and wonderful father he was. He was a decent man who took care of so many family and friends in his lifetime. I found that thinking about him after 30 hours of climbing made the journey that much more memorable.

We continued down to Camp 4. I was getting warmer, but the wind was also increasing. It was another hour of down climbing over snow, ice and rock to camp. I stopped to take some photos. It was just Pega, Dawa and me as we neared the bottom of the Triangle Face. As we entered camp it was quiet. The climbers from yesterday had left for Camp 2 and more climbers were somewhere between Camp 4 and the summit. I was greeted by Funuru. He gave me a big hug and said, "I knew you could do it!" He brought me to tears again as I told him that it was his experience, planning and leadership that allowed me to get to the summit of Everest.

He told me that I should rest and then I should go to Camp 2 that afternoon. I asked him what time it was and he told me it was 9:30. Only Woody was back beside myself. I arrived at my tent and looked around. Torn tents, empty oxygen canisters and propane canisters. Wrappers of all forms of energy bars. Cans from many years ago all littered the camp. I dropped my pack and pulled out my oxygen tank. I crawled into my tent with my oxygen and dropped onto my sleeping bag still in my down suit.

I slept until Chris arrived and he did the same dance I had done an hour earlier. Funuru asked Chris if he was going to climb down and he said he was too tired and wanted to sleep and climb down the following day. Funuru made it sound like we had to decide together, along with Justin and L.C. Chris was really tired and said that he was not going to go. I was a little concerned. I didn't want to stay at Camp 4. It would mean continuing on oxygen and eating bars and candy for another day. Funuru came back and told Chris that he could stay because Justin and L.C. were staying and I could go if I wanted.



A NIGHT ON EVEREST

I didn't really want to get up and climb for another four to five hours, but I wanted out of Camp 4. It was a scary place. I fell back asleep and was shaken awake at about noon. Funuru and Pega said 'let's go.' I think that was the hardest 45 minutes for me. I was half asleep and trying to pack. I was not doing very well. I was moving very slowly and not getting anywhere close to being ready. Eventually both Funuru and Pega had to help me pack if they had any hope of getting me moving.

We did leave around 1 p.m. Pega and Dawa climbed down with me. Dawa didn't need to bring anything of mine. He was carrying down Camp 4 supplies that needed to be removed. Pega had my sleeping bag and sleeping pad. Funuru told me to leave my extra food in the tent. We were now approaching 30 hours of climbing with a two-hour break. Pega pointed to the start of the trail out of Camp 4 and told me to go ahead and he would catch up in a moment. Dawa was with Pega. I thought I remembered where the route started, but as I left my tent and walked toward the Spur, I couldn't find the way. There was nobody around and Pega was nowhere to be seen.

I was about to walk back to the tent when I saw Pega and he waved and pointed to head forward. We eventually joined up.

We had to traverse the Geneva Spur again. I was finally waking up from my short nap. The Spur was slippery rock that is flat for the first section and then steep for the last third. There was very little traffic with mostly Sherpa going down the mountain. They were passing us. We made it down and to the upper section of Lhotse face. We passed a few climbers and Sherpa coming up. I guess some climbers would be trying to summit on the 24th. We climbed down past Camp 3.5 where I had seen the first downed climber on the way up. We descended the Yellow Band with a combination of down climbing forward and rappelling backwards. The Yellow Band is very steep slippery rock. Crampons don't grab and mostly just slip. Going forward or backwards is hard work to maintain balance and not slip or fall. Once off the Band and onto ice, I felt more in control. Depending on the ice and steepness I would climb down forward in some areas and rappel backwards in other areas.

Beyond the Yellow Band was the majority of the Lhotse Face. It was another 30 minutes to get to what was left of Camp 3. Most of the tents for our high Camp 3 were gone. Only two of the ten tents remained. I was getting thirsty, so we stopped for a break. I was now drinking my water mixed with UCAN at a faster rate than when we climbed to the summit earlier.

After our break we continued down. The amount of traffic over the past several days had transformed the Lhotse Face from a steep sheet of ice two weeks earlier to a series of steps lightly covered with snow. The conditions made forward down climbing easier with no need to rappel. We continued down in good spirits. Pega had his cell phone out and was taking pictures and video. I also pulled out my camera only to remember that I had covered it with gel accidentally. The gel had frozen enough that I could break it off rather than smear it around. I cleaned it enough to take pictures when I could. It was sunny and around 3:00 pm. It was warmer and I was able to convert to a pair of gloves and pack the mittens away. I had on my sunglasses since leaving Camp 4.



As we approached lower Camp 3 we had to rappel a steep wall. I remember climbing it on the way up. This would be the last time I would pass this spot. We took another break at lower Camp 3 because I was thirsty again. My dehydration was catching up to me and I was having trouble quenching my thirst. I had enough water remaining to get to Camp 2. I was not worried.

Below Camp 3 the steep climbing continued down the Lhotse Face. It was so beautiful. Most of the teams going to the summit had already passed us above Camp 3. We only had to manage the very fast Sherpa without clients who would pass us like we were turtles. I thought we were moving quickly, but maybe I was mistaken.

We caught up to Avo, one of my teammates, and Adam, one of the IMG guides. They were taking a break. I hadn't spoken to them since the summit and now we were comparing notes. Avo and I had shared a tent at both Camps 2 and 3. I was so happy that he had summited and was also coming down to Camp 2. We left lower Camp 3 and continued down to the Bergschrund.

The last part of the Lhotse Face was full of steep walls that required rappelling. As I descended, I couldn't help but think about how physical it would have been to climb up. It was all a distant memory even though it had only been two days. We rappelled down to the final section of the Lhotse face. As I approached the end of the rope, I was now on the flats back to Camp 2. It would take about 1 ½ hours. I still didn't have a watch and had no idea what time it was. The sun was getting lower in the West, but we still had daylight. Since sunset was around 6:30 p.m. I guessed it was probably around 4 p.m.

We stopped again and I had more water and some shelled pistachios. I unzipped my down suit. I was getting hot and I had been sweating for a while. Thank goodness I was going to our camp. Otherwise, wet clothes when it got dark would be very dangerous. There would be no way to change and I would freeze very quickly.

We moved quickly on the flats as we could see the camp come into view. Little by little the camp got closer and closer until we were nearly there. Just outside of camp we removed our crampons. I was now feeling tired.

I guess that's not a surprise, as I had been up for nearly 36 hours with barely a nap. I was still breathing the remaining oxygen in my tank. We were on the outside of the camp. Some expeditions had already packed up and left. Camp 2 was looking smaller. We snaked our way to our campsite and I dropped my pack at the dining tent and peeked my head inside. It was dinner time for Team 1. They had mostly returned the day before as I was getting ready for the summit. The cheers and hugs were so appreciated and uplifting after such a long ordeal.

I went in and Tashi, our cook, gave me a hug and told me to sit down. I still had my harness and down suit on. He gave me a hot towel, a breakfast and dinner ritual. I could smell the food around the table. He brought me soup as I made some tea. I was so thirsty. I had two bowls of mystery soup. It didn't matter what it was. It was delicious. He then brought a plate with a chicken leg, Mac n' cheese and fried rice. Oh my God! I was so happy. I had been dreaming of a hot meal for almost two days. I left camp 4 for this meal and it was everything I hoped for.



The mood was fantastic with everyone talking about what they saw and how they managed. Each climber had a story. I began to realize that we would all return home and tell it a little differently. Partly because we were not always together, but more likely because the lack of oxygen affected us in ways that made us each see events differently. While each of us will swear that our version is the correct version, I will tell everyone, maybe this is how it happened, maybe not!

As I was eating, Avo made it to camp and looking at him was a glimpse of what I must look like. As he collapsed into a chair, Tashi brought him a hot towel. I realized that I had not gone to the bathroom in 24 hours. I excused myself and stepped outside the dining tent. I could see the sun going down and noticed it was getting quiet cold.

I don't want to tell you the color of my urine, but I can tell you that clearly I didn't drink enough during the previous 36 hours.

I went to the tent that I had occupied on the way up to the summit. I had left my belongings in a rice bag. When I unzipped the front fly, I noticed that someone else had moved in. I was not happy. I wanted to get out of my damp clothes and crawl into my sleeping bag. I asked Harry which tent I could use as I was starting to shiver. He told me to use Justin and L.C.'s for the night. They were still at Camp 4 with Chris. I gathered my stuff and threw it all in the other tent. I was really getting cold from being damp. I was trying to get out my sleeping bag and take off my boots and clothes. Charlotte came by and helped me get my boots off. I peeled off my down suit and all the layers underneath. Even my shorts were damp, so they came off as well. I was buck-naked in my sleeping bag. I was too exhausted to find any dry clothing. I blew up my mattress pad and rolled onto it. The next thing I remember was waking up to the sound of the others getting ready to leave for base camp. I must be around 5:00 a.m., I thought. I was warm in my bag all zipped up. It was still dark. I rolled over and fell asleep. It was a few hours later when I awoke, and this time I peeked my head out of my sleeping bag and it was light. I unzipped my bag so that I could find some dry clothes. The climbing layers that were inside my sleeping bag had dried enough to put on. My down suit was next to my sleeping bag and was cold and partly frozen from the remaining dampness. While I was putting on my clothes, I noticed that my watch was halfway up my left arm. It was 6:30 a.m. I had been asleep for 11 hours. I was adding layers when I thought to myself that I had just found my watch.

It was on my arm the entire time and I never knew it.

ALTITUDE DOES MAKE ME STUPID. THAT'S MY EXCUSE!

I rested for the remainder of the day while others returned from Camp 4. We would share pictures and stories before going to sleep. We would be up at 5 a.m. to leave for basecamp. This was our last time leaving Camp 2. As we had breakfast the Sherpa were taking down tents. They were anxious to leave as well. It would take 5 hours to get back to basecamp. When we arrived at base camp we were greeted by Greg with a giant hug and some tears of joy. He said that he knew I could do this ever since our first phone conversation almost three years earlier. He offered me a beer and I went for the Coke instead. Kaji prepared some Ramen noodles and then some chicken and rice. I was told that I could catch a helicopter in two hours if I could pack everything up. With Pega's help, I loaded both of my duffels. I gave him a large tip, and now he teared up and gave me a big hug. He said that I was very generous and a great climbing partner. I was really touched by his sincerity. We carried the duffels to the helicopter pad we had rebuilt one month earlier. Funuru told us that he needed a larger pad, but I think he just wanted us to work off some excess energy.

As we waited for the helicopter to arrive, we laughed and joked. The Sherpa, Funuru, Greg, Harry and others. Sixty days, 29,032 ft., multiple trips up and back the mountain, card games, movie nights, a wedding, heartbreak for some, vomiting, diarrhea, pink eye (oh yeah, I forgot to mention I got pink eye), snow, wind, excitement and fear. It was so much more. It was the adventure of a lifetime! **BRT**