

ATTACHMENT 2: A MOUNTAINTOP EXPERIENCE

One of the greatest mountaintop experiences ever recorded happened on May 19, 1953. That was the day when Edmund Hillary and his native Sherpa guide, Tenzing Norgay, reached the top of Mount Everest. They were the first two people ever to be literally on top of the world, somewhat like Peter, James and John. After Hillary had climbed Mount Everest, he became what most people think they desire most of all in life: he became an overnight celebrity. He was knighted by Queen Elizabeth. His name became a household word, which to most Scandinavians is even better than being knighted. He achieved celebrity status as his name appeared as a logo on sleeping bags, tents, and boot laces. You can't do better than that.

Edmund Hillary could have tried to live in his little dwelling of success for the rest of his life. But he knew better. He knew that life is not really lived on top. So what did he do? He went back to little, out-of-the-way Nepal. Back to the Sherpas, whom he had grown to know and appreciate and respect and love. And he used his fame to bring them help.

In a speech given some years ago, Hillary recounted how an elderly Sherpa from Khumjung village, the hometown of most of the Sherpas on his Everest ascent, had come to him a few years after that expedition and said, "Our children lack education. They are not prepared for the future. What we need more than anything is a school in Khumjung." So Hillary established the Himalayan Trust and in 1961 a three-room schoolhouse was built in Khumjung with funds raised by Hillary. In its first decade the fund focused on education and health. Since then, the trust has built twenty-seven schools, two hospitals, and twelve medical clinics, plus numerous bridges and airfields. They are also involved in the reforestation of valleys and slopes in many areas of Nepal.

Hillary spent more than half the year traveling the world, raising money for the trust and supervising its various projects,. And he has continued to do this for more than thirty years. Many people today don't know Edmund Hillary. He's no longer a household word – He's certainly no match for Jennifer Lopez or Eminem – and you won't find him endorsing products. His monument is not written on plaques or sewn on clothing labels, but in the countless hearts of happy children. After his fifteen minutes of fame with the world, he has eternal fame with a grateful people and a loving God.