

Dawa F Sherpa

English 364

Expository and critical thinking

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“*Kanchi*, I will wear this when return to Kathmandu. Please don’t forget to pack it,” mother told *Kanchi* on the night before she left. I wanted to see her come back wearing that dress, but we never got a chance—the mountains devoured her.

The news was big this time; she was in paper, television, magazines, everywhere. It was her fourth attempt to scale Mt. Everest. For us it was just a regular trekking expedition like the many she has been going since we were small. My younger sister Diki and brother Namgyal cried when we bid our mother goodbye, something they had never done before on these occasions and I cried along. My father was also going with her this time, making the first Nepali couple to climb Everest. We did not go the airport to see our parents off instead we pack our things and went to my uncle’s house.

Once our parents were on the way to the Everest base camp we got call from them. They told us they would not be able to call after they reach base camp. I asked my mother, “Will you write to us like last time?” She said she did not know. She could not write letters herself, but she would dictate it to someone else who could. Often her letters would talk to us about being good students, asking me to take care of my younger siblings and not to trouble our aunts and uncles under whose care we would be at those times. She never went to school. She was the only daughter in the family with two older and younger brothers. “Being the only daughter I had to help my mother with the household work.” she said explained to me. She had six months formal vocabulary

education though, an English Language class and a certificate to prove it. Whenever somebody asked Namgyal how educated my mother was, he used to say, “She has been to college, there is a certificate at home.” My parents loved his innocence. I think he was my mother’s favorite probably because he was the only son. My father went to school till the sixth grade. Back then, education in villages was not a priority. Families used to be huge and in order to support the family children had to help in the household work.

My parents met in their village and my grandparents did not approve of their relationship. That’s why they left the village and came to the city. “Your grandfather made a report at the police station when we eloped,” my father had once reminisced. It was difficult for them to make a new beginning in the city. “We lived in a one room apartment when you were just born,” my mother had added.

My father was a trekking guide, a traditional profession for the Sherpas of Nepal. He would be on trekking expeditions four times a year and each expedition lasted about a month. My mother was a simple housewife like most married women at that time. But before she met my father, she too worked as a trekking guide accompanying her father. Life started improving as my father’s financial situation grew better. He rose from a rank of a guide to a ‘Sirdar,’ the highest rank one could achieve as a trekking guide. Some of the foreign trekkers were very impressed with him, especially the French. They were so impressed that they took him to France where he worked for several months. During this time mother took care of us all by herself. She had a difficult time raising three children with a limited amount of money that father would be able to send to her from France. From that amount, she not only had to take care of us, but also pay all of the bills for school and rent. But she never complained about anything to us, and always tried to do

her best, sacrificing things of her interest and giving it to us. Sometime she would have actually managed to save a little money with which she'd give my siblings and me a surprise treat by taking us out to town to eat or buy new clothes. Upon his return, he opened a small trekking agency with only four employees. My mother helped him with his business. I remember the office was on the first floor, and we lived on the second floor. It was during that time when she went on her first attempt. There was a store in the office where all the food supplies were kept for trekking. It was our favorite part of the office. We were always found in the store room stealing food. Then when I was in the sixth grade we moved to our own house. It was big and beautiful. We loved it because we did not have to share rooms anymore. It had only been a few months since we had moved there when my parents left to the climb Mt. Everest.

It was an early April morning. We did not have school so we were all playing in the garden. The phone rang and I ran inside thinking it was of our parents calling, but my aunt received it. She looked panic stricken. "O.K I will go there. Should I get some rice too?" I heard her say. I was confused and was staring at her. I asked her what happened. She said we had to go to see the fortune teller. She started putting some rice in a bag when the phone rang again. I did not know what happened, but it was decided we did not have to go after all. That night my uncle came to our house. They told me that my mother climbed Mt. Everest successfully. I was overjoyed and told Diki and Namgyal about it. But there was bad news too. We were told that mother lost her way on the back and the other team members were still waiting for her arrival. I asked about father. They said he fell ill and aborted the expedition from the second base camp.

The next day we returned home. Puja and other rituals started being held in the house. Suddenly our house was full of monks praying for mother. The pujas ran from sunrise to sunset for days. My uncles, aunts, and other relatives had all started living in our house. The media too had over whelmed us. People were constantly waiting outside our house. Finally, father returned after a few days. He looked very ill. We naturally burst into tears. It was the first time I saw him cry. His lips were dry, his skin peeling, and he had lost a lot of weight. After my father got home, there was more news. It had been days but there was no trace of mother. She and one of the team member were the only two lost. They said my mother stayed back because the other team member became sick. The government sent rescue teams to look for her. The search crossed over across Mt. Everest's northern face into Tibet, but there were no news of her there either

The sound of drums, and some instrument played by monks were depressing but the puja had to go on. Everyday we prayed to God that mother would make it. After 19 days, they found her body covered by ice. The rescue team had a tough time getting her out since her body was buried deep into snow and ice. Mother was brought home the next day.

I could not believe it. Deep within me I thought she would make it, but we were devastated to see her dead body. The entire house was crying. Her body was kept in the living room in a steel box placed on ice. Diki asked my father why they were doing that. "So that her body does not stink" he said coldly. She was only seven years old, Namgyal ten and I was twelve. "The children are so young," one of the visitors who came to give condolences said. This was a line that I heard for many days to follow. The door was

open for anybody to come and pay their respect or grieve. The prime minister came by and the Royal Palace sent a letter of condolence.

It has now been 10 years since mother's death. Much has changed since. Recently National Geographic has written about her and she was awarded the Rastriya Bhivuti, a national hero's medal, by the King of Nepal. Father now also runs a wall climbing foundation named after mother and our travel business has expanded vastly. Namgyal and I are both studying here in America and Diki is looking to do the same next year. The lines where my mother's influence in my life begins and ends are a blur, and I always wish that she was here today to tell me about her adventures of running away with her lover and of climbing mountains. But I have memories—of a woman who followed her dream and reached the top of the world, a mother who even in difficult times gave her family all that a mother could and a person whose courage and faith in one's self made her a legacy.

