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# National Geographic: Return To Everest

By Unknown

Return to Everest

In the Himalayan foothills,  
Kathmandu long has been a crossroads  
its streets and holy places  
filled with travelers enroute  
to a thousand destinations  
many may never reach.

Watched by the gods,  
some go to market to sell or buy,  
some seek to earn a higher form  
in their next reincarnation,  
some climb the steep  
steps to Nirvana,  
hoping to escape the tumult  
of daily life.

Sometimes the destinations are  
only disguised beginnings.

For sir Edmund Hillary,  
first conqueror of Mount Everest,  
his greatest journey would  
only begin at the summit.

It would traverse not only  
the great landforms of Earth,  
but a less visible geography  
the private landscapes of one man's  
passage through the years.

At last among the long isolated  
Sherpas of the Khumbu region  
south of Everest,  
it would bring a new challenge,  
a new adventure,  
hardly 20 miles from  
where his journey began.

Today Hillary is a folk hero  
in the Khumbu.

With ceremonial scarves or katas,  
the Sherpa children honor not  
the great sahib  
who climbs mountains  
but the friendly giant  
who has brought them  
their first glimpses of a world  
they never knew.

It has been a trade of sorts.

In changing their lives,  
Hillary has changed his own.  
In the Khumbu highlands of  
Nepal each dawn is a discovery.  
Again the peaks emerge  
Ama Dablam, Kantega,  
Thamserku, Everest  
silent sentinels of Earth's  
highest mountains, the Himalayas.  
In the Sherpa villages  
of Kunde and Khumjung,  
less habit yaks and goats are sent to stony pas  
and the juniper smoke from  
a hundred scattered fires  
carries morning prayers to the gods.  
At 13,000 feet the gods  
are never far away.  
Formed forty million years ago  
by the collision  
of the Indian landmass  
and the Eurasian continent,  
Nepal is a country set on edge.  
Here, near Everest,  
Tibetan Sherpas long ago  
found sanctuary.  
Here for centuries they lived  
in rigorous isolation,  
an island in time.  
One man has become  
a major instrument of change,  
bringing both blessings and danger.  
With his son, Peter,  
Sir Edmund Hillary has returned  
this way many times,  
but this year holds  
a special meaning  
it is the 30th anniversary  
of the first conquest of Everest.  
"I get quite a thrill every time  
I come back to  
these two main Sherpa villages.  
There's so much here  
that's pleasantly familiar.  
There's also the thought of soon

being reunited with  
so many old friends."  
Again they walk the village lanes,  
welcomed by the greeting  
of clasped hands  
and murmured "Namaste!"  
Already fields are being prepared  
and planted with grains or potatoes  
for the short upland growing season.  
Across a wall bounds  
an old and irrepressible friend,  
Phudorje, Hillary's companion  
on many a climb.  
Everywhere young life  
explores a world made new.  
It is spring.  
At last father and son  
enter the house  
that long ago became a second home.  
"Oh, Ang Dooli! Namaste!"  
"Namaste!"  
"Very good to see you."  
"Yes, same. Namaste!"  
"In this house I can always  
be sure of a warm welcome  
and a cup of Tibetan tea.  
Over the years my family and  
I have spent much time here  
with Mingma Tsering and  
his wife Ang Dooli.  
And they're still  
my closest Sherpa friends."  
In daily tasks, Ang Dooli endures.  
Having lost eight of eleven children  
she eagerly welcomed  
the Hillary family as her own.  
Upon the wall hang snapshots,  
fragments of life captured long ago...  
Hillary's daughters Belinda  
and Sarah...  
his wife, Louise, and the children...  
young Peter with protective god...  
playful Belinda the youngest child.  
"Ah, thank you, Ang Dooli!"

Now a painter,  
surviving son Temba remains  
a victim of iodine deficiency,  
once common in the Khumbu.  
"Hey, Temba!"  
"Ah, what's that? What's that?"  
"Thyangboche."  
"Thyangboche."  
"There."  
Pivot on which so many destinies  
have turned,  
it was Everest that once joined  
the widely separated lives of  
Hillary and Tenzing Norgay,  
his Sherpa partner  
on their historic climb.  
Now, amid the peaks on the trail  
to Everest, they meet again.  
Still strong at 69,  
Tenzing and his daughter Deki  
have come from Darjeeling  
to join the anniversary festivities.  
"Oh, Tenzing! Good to see you."  
"...Deki."  
"Hi, Deki. How are you?"  
"Fine."  
"Very nice to meet you."  
"Hi, Peter..."  
"Hi. Long time, Tenzing.  
It's good to see you again."  
"Yes, did you have a good walk up?"  
"Very well. Very fine, thank you."  
In Britain today there will be  
a more formal celebration,  
but Hillary and Tenzing  
have chosen to come here,  
not only to be honored,  
but to honor the families  
of so many Sherpas  
who have risked and often lost  
their lives on many an expedition.  
"Ah, that's good."  
"Yes."  
"Namaste, Tenzing."

"Namaste."

For a moment two aging heroes  
pause to honor each other,  
look back to the victory  
they shared.

Remote, seemingly beyond  
the reach of human effort,  
the towering mass of Everest  
at mid-century had defeated  
all attempts to reach the summit.  
Then, as Nepal opened to foreigners,  
assaults at last were possible  
from the south.

In the British Expedition of 1953,  
guide Tenzing Norgay,  
already veteran of  
five failed attempts,  
would be teamed with Hillary,  
who earlier had sighted  
a possible route via the South Col.  
With the return of  
the first assault team  
the challenge was passed  
to Hillary and Tenzing.  
The earlier team had reached  
a point hardly 300 feet  
below the summit.

Now, exhausted and frozen,  
they were somber evidence of  
the tests that lay ahead.  
But storm intervened.

Only after a night wracked by  
winds could Hillary and Tenzing  
at last climb the icy blade  
to the summit.

There they left in the snow  
a bar of chocolate and  
some biscuits.

At a lower camp, the main party  
waited in growing suspense  
while leader John Hunt scanned  
the ridges and icefalls above.  
Then at last  
the returning climbers appeared,

led by a teammate lifting  
his thumb in a sign of triumph.  
Briefly the triumph was shared  
only with comrades.  
Then word flashed to the world.  
"This is the BBC Home Service.  
Here is the news.  
Mount Everest has been conquered  
by members of the British Expedition  
The news reached London  
in a message to the Times.  
It said that Mr. E.P. Hillary,  
a New Zealander,  
and Tenzing Bhotia, a Sherpa,  
had reached the summit  
last Friday, May 29th.  
The message added, 'All is well.'  
In London the coronation of  
the Queen now was marked  
by a fitting tribute.  
For a new Queen Elizabeth,  
an obscure New Zealand beekeeper  
had set a flag in high, thin air,  
passed a boundary  
never crossed by man.  
Quickly knighted by the Queen,  
Sir Edmund soon pledged loyalty  
to another lady - Louise,  
the young musician  
who became his wife.  
Yet domestic bliss soon  
would be exchanged  
for the wintry wastes of Antarctica.  
There, Hillary would lead  
a caravan of modified farm  
tractors to the South Pole,  
setting up supply depots for  
the first Antarctic crossing.  
Hero to the world,  
symbol of high adventure,  
his life would become  
a continuing odyssey,  
seeking new challenges  
around the globe.

Sometimes,  
with the indomitable Louise  
on less spectacular expeditions  
in New Zealand or  
the Alaskan wilderness,  
he discovered the new adventure  
of watching his children grow.  
But always Hillary  
came back to Nepal.  
Long a forbidden kingdom  
locked from the world,  
Nepal had barely 200 miles of road  
when at last opened to  
foreigners in 1949.  
Its few vehicles, machines,  
and even grand pianos were brought  
over the southern ridges  
on the backs of men.  
Its terraced uplands,  
built by the labor of centuries,  
were joined by a labyrinth  
of trails on which  
astonishing burdens were carried  
by the hardy hill folk or  
their caravans of yaks.  
Later each return of the family  
would become a journey  
of discovery,  
particularly for Louise  
whose lighthearted accounts  
of their travels soon  
became best-selling books.  
Learning the country  
by climbing it,  
the children were taken by  
their father to see the great peak  
that changed his destiny and theirs  
For the first time 12-year-old  
Peter would glimpse the mountain  
that one day would draw him like  
an inescapable challenge.  
With deepening regard for  
the warmhearted Sherpas,  
the Hillarys eagerly lent



a hand wherever needed,  
opened the door to a culture  
distant from their own origins.  
On a mountainside at Thami  
not far from the Tibetan border,  
they helped build a supporting  
wall for a Buddhist monastery.  
Its new leader was  
a 12-year-old boy,  
believed to be the reincarnation  
of a previous head lama or rimpoche.  
"When I first went to the Himalayas,  
my major interest really was  
in climbing mountains.  
I got to know the local people,  
the Sherpas,  
and enjoyed them very much.  
And by spending time in the villages,  
it became impossible for me  
not to realize that  
there were so many things lacking.  
So many things that we took for  
granted in our society,  
they simply didn't have.  
And because I was very fond  
of my Sherpa friends,  
I had this sort of nagging  
worry all the time  
shouldn't we be trying to  
do something  
about the future of the Sherpas?  
And to help them to  
withstand the changes  
that were likely to take place?"  
Around Hillary, often watching,  
were the beautiful Sherpa children  
open, quick to laugh,  
endlessly inventive in play.  
Yet untaught, their innocence  
one day could become a prison.  
In all of the Khumbu there was  
not a school to help them grow.  
He would always remember  
the words of a village leader:

"Our children have eyes,  
but they are blind."

"And it was then at  
that particular occasion  
that I decided that  
instead of sort  
of thinking about it for years  
and talking about it,  
maybe I should try and  
do something about it."

Abruptly, Sir Edmund Hillary  
became a part-time carpenter.  
Drawing help from contributors in  
New Zealand and the United States,  
he formed the Himalayan Trust  
to support the program.  
Today, still building after  
more than two decades,  
he has completed and staffed  
no fewer than 22 schools  
across the Khumbu.

"We have a good,  
experienced team to do the job.  
My brother, Rex, is a builder  
by trade back in New Zealand.  
And he's come over here quite a few  
times to help on these projects.  
But without Mingma's organization  
and authority amongst the Sherpas,  
I could have done nothing."

The patterns of construction  
have changed little  
since the building  
of the first school in 1961.  
Some children help  
some children watch  
some children imitate.

For some,  
classes have already begun.

"...has entered."

"He has entered."

"His house."

"His house."

"The men are climbing the mountain."

"The men are climbing the mountain."

"The mountain."

"The mountain."

"The mountain."

"The mountain."

"The men have climbed the mountain."

"The men have climbed the mountain."

"This is the thing I've  
always liked about the Sherpas.

They always are prepared  
and know what they can do.

And they know that  
they don't have money,  
but they have the strength  
of their hands.

In days gone by,  
even my own children,  
Peter, Sarah, and Belinda,  
used to work in with  
the local children,  
carrying rocks and  
carrying chunks of timber,  
and I really think they enjoyed it.

It is quite exciting  
to watch a school rise up  
from its foundations  
and to see the rock  
I used to climb  
being fashioned into  
schoolhouse walls."

A rudimentary structure, unheated,  
dependent on natural light,  
the new school at Chaunrikarka  
is a center of village pride.  
Quickly the people gather,  
bringing bottles of chang,  
the local spirits,  
for the celebration.

"I always feel a slight degree  
of apprehension about  
get-togethers like these.  
Any Sherpa gathering tends to  
become a somewhat festive occasion  
with the local beer and spirits

flowing rather freely and  
mostly in my direction.  
And it's really quite a challenge  
to survive these functions  
in an upright position."  
"On behalf of the Himalayan Trust  
and all those who have helped  
build this school,  
I have much pleasure now  
in declaring the school open."  
For the first time the children  
enter the still empty classroom.  
Here, in this vacancy,  
each will embark on  
a new journey of discovery,  
find new mountains to climb.  
Today across the Khumbu  
the school bells ring,  
many the empty oxygen flasks used  
by Hillary and other climbers.  
Over the highland ridges more than  
a thousand Sherpa children  
hurry to class each day,  
some to schools more than  
a three-hour journey from home.  
"Are you sleeping,  
are you sleeping?  
Brother John, Brother John.  
Morning bell is ringing,  
morning bell is ringing.  
Ding done ding,  
dong ding dong."  
At Khumjung, Hillary remains  
close to its day-to-day activities,  
still enjoys visiting  
the first school he ever built,  
watching children draw pictures  
of a wider world they have never  
seen outside a book.  
Largest of Khumbu schools with  
an enrollment of nearly 300,  
Khumjung has a proud record of  
outstanding students,  
some already entering leadership

roles in Nepal.  
The soccer team, of course,  
remains invincible to lowland teams  
who quickly struggle  
for breath at 13,000 feet.  
But schools are only part of  
a wider effort by Hillary  
and his associates.  
Under his direction,  
three landing strips have been  
carved on the mountainsides,  
ending forever the centuries-long  
isolation of the Sherpas.  
In the mysterious symbols  
printed on the cargo,  
passing children sometimes  
try to imagine the wonders  
of the world from which it came.  
Built by Hillary,  
scattered clinics and two hospitals  
at last provide medical care  
and have brought a new awareness  
among the Sherpas  
that smoky dwellings and  
lack of sanitation  
cause many of their chronic maladies  
At Kunde even the local lama  
has found a new trust  
in modern medicine.  
In a region where formerly half  
the youth died before twenty,  
there has been  
a dramatic improvement  
in the treatment of  
children's afflictions  
and a corresponding drop  
in the mortality rate.  
For some, the cure seemed  
nearly miraculous.  
Here, a boy, whose hearing has  
been severely impaired since birth,  
can hear the full wonder of sound  
for the first time.  
But as Hillary learned during

the building of  
Phaphlu hospital in 1975,  
preparations for errands of mercy  
are sometimes of little use.  
Eagerly awaiting the arrival  
of his wife, Louise,  
and young Belinda from Kathmandu,  
he learned that both had been  
killed in the crash  
of their plane shortly  
after takeoff.  
For Hillary that day was darkness,  
the beginning of a long journey  
across a private wasteland  
without compass or place to rest.  
"I didn't really know  
what else to do apart  
from going on building the hospital,  
and then later  
we went back to Khumbu  
and spent time with Mingma and  
Ang Dooli and various  
other friends,  
and that was it. And they,  
you know, they all helped a bit."  
Shaken, Hillary went back to work,  
building new classrooms,  
adding to others.  
"Thin walls. A bit bulgy."  
"Yeah."  
"Well, I think we had better  
do a proper job of it."  
"Uh, hum."  
"You'll have to put a lot of  
framework in, won't you?"  
"Yeah. Let's measure."  
Now at Namche Bazar  
with his brother, Rex,  
he studies the damage of time  
and weather to a school  
built years ago,  
draws plans for needed repairs  
on its structure.  
"Namaste."

"I think we're going to..."  
Still Hillary's trusted sirdar  
or foreman,  
Mingma Tsering jokes  
over the division  
of labor in providing the lumber  
who will cut and who will carry.  
"...okay, carry."  
"Will they help you carry?"  
"Yes. It's o. k?"  
"Yeah, that's good."  
"Big help."  
"Those are cutting...  
and they carry."  
"Yep."  
Drawn closer by tragedy,  
Hillary and Peter each feel  
a renewed awareness of the risk  
that lies in every human attachment.  
Now veteran climbers both,  
often in personal peril,  
each has seen close friends and  
companions lost on mountain walls.  
Even Peter was nearly sacrificed  
on the soaring altar of Ama Dablam.  
Struck by an avalanche high  
on its icy wall,  
severely injured and  
climbing equipment swept away,  
Peter nearly died in the two days  
before he finally could  
be lowered to safety.  
For Hillary himself the summits  
have anew and poignant meaning.  
He can never again return to  
those icy heights.  
Several times in recent years  
he has suffered critical  
attacks of cerebral edema  
or altitude sickness.  
Twice in delirium he has had  
to be led or  
carried from the thin upper air  
to lower altitudes to save his life.

Today,  
the man who first climbed Everest  
must remain below 14,000 feet.  
But today with Peter and Mingma  
he will press the barrier,  
view at a distance the summit  
on which he stood 30 years ago.  
For at last Peter is ready to  
answer the summons  
he first felt as a 12-year-old boy  
staring in awe at the mountain  
his father had climbed.  
Already Peter has made preparations  
for an attempt on Everest  
by its formidable West Ridge.  
A geologic accident that  
became the highest point on Earth,  
Everest has long been  
a challenge to Western man.  
But to the Sherpas the peaks  
were something else.  
Migrating from Tibet  
several centuries ago,  
the Sherpas found an endlessly  
changing world of mist and stone  
where peaks and trees and streams  
appeared and vanished  
with magical swiftness.  
Quickly their imaginations populated  
the landscape with gods, demons,  
and spirits of every kind.  
Even the trees were sometime  
believed to be  
the dwelling place of sacred beings.  
In a continuing dialogue  
with the invisible  
or disguised powers around them,  
they have given prayer  
a thousand forms,  
a thousand means of transmission  
written on hand-turned  
cylinders and waterwheels,  
printed on prayer flags and  
banners waving in the wind,



inscribed on shrines or chortens  
engraved on stone tablets or manis  
even on rocks in rivers  
and trailside boulders.  
Committed to the elements,  
it is hoped that the prayers  
will reach their protective gods.  
The sun diffuses the fading prayer,  
rain spreads it through the rivers,  
wind carries it to the heavens.  
Surrounded by prayer in life,  
Sherpa are followed by prayer  
even in death.  
Into the ear of the dead,  
the dying, or those soon to die,  
a monk chants passages from  
the Tibetan Book of the Dead  
to guide the consciousness  
of the deceased in the interval  
between death and rebirth.  
Yet prayers must be learned and  
preserved by the living.  
At Thami Monastery, its greatest  
library of Buddhist scripture  
must be read and taught each year.  
Once it was customary for one son  
in each family to become a monk.  
But with the growth of tourism  
a young monk may well envy  
the Western clothing  
and wrist watch of brother  
who has become a trekking guide.  
First encountered as  
a 12-year-old boy,  
the head lama again welcomes  
an old friend.  
With Peter and Mingma,  
Hillary has come to help  
preparations for Mani Rimdu,  
a yearly Buddhist festival  
to protect the Khumbu.  
"Ah, Namaste."  
"Namaste. How are you?"  
"I'm very well, thank you!"

"Namaste."

In the courtyard of the monastery,  
helped by barelegged monks,  
Rex and the rest of  
the Hillary construction team  
are swiftly completing improvements  
on the paved court  
and adjoining structures.  
With time growing short,  
Hillary and Peter also  
join the crew.  
Soon the balcony and yard  
will be crowded with Sherpas  
and a few tourists who have  
made the pilgrimage  
over the steep mountain trails,  
some from villages  
many days' walk away.  
With a sounding of horns  
the great cycle of dances begins.  
As in the religious mystery  
plays of the Middle Ages,  
the Sherpas act out their myths,  
make theater out of faith.  
Often using the symbols of  
ancient beliefs in magic,  
the dances again promise  
the victory of good over evil.  
In the Khumbu every mountain  
has a spirit.  
Mani Rimdu exorcises the demons  
that threaten it.  
Backstage in the gompa or temple,  
another ritual is taking place.  
Donning the sacred masks  
and costumes,  
decorated with an array  
of mythic symbols,  
men are becoming gods.  
For a little while  
they will become the holy figures  
invented by human need.  
Now, like a challenge,  
a crash of cymbals demands

the attention of  
the threatening adversaries.  
For it is in the dance of  
the so-called Eight Furies  
that the climactic struggle  
with the evil spirits occurs.  
In it the benign gods  
rise in terrible wrath  
to defeat and drive away the demons.  
Once again the protective gods  
disappear into the gompa.  
Once again the villages are safe  
from demons for another year.  
As always, the people form a line  
to pass the rimpoche,  
bring gifts wrapped  
in ceremonial katas.  
One by one they are blessed,  
take a sip of tu or holy water  
with a sprinkle on the head,  
then taste a bit of tormo,  
made of flour and butter -  
the ritual greatly similar to  
Christian communion  
with its wine and wafer.  
Yet, watching the rimpoche  
bless the people,  
Hillary remembers another visit  
when the head lama was a child  
and the Hillary family  
helped build a wall.  
On the western ridge above Kunde,  
Mingma's wife, Ang Dooli,  
also remembers.  
In a more private ritual  
she brings juniper to the shrine  
she and other villagers  
built long ago  
for Louise and Belinda Hillary.  
Yet even the Eight Furies cannot  
protect the Sherpa villagers  
from the risks of change.  
Once reached only by an arduous  
two-week walk over mountain trails

the distance from Kathmandu now  
can be covered by plane  
in less than an hour  
provided of course that  
the Lukla airstrip,  
which bears some resemblance  
to a ski jump,  
can be found in  
the frequent overcast.  
Speaking a dozen languages,  
tourists from Europe, Asia,  
and America disembark  
from the aircraft,  
pass through the villages  
alarming small dogs,  
awakening the merchants,  
and delighting the local children  
who have discovered the blessings  
of balloons and bubble gum.  
Today the Khumbu is invaded  
yearly by thousands of trekkers  
and porters plodding the steep  
trails and spreading their bivouacs  
across the upper slopes like  
an occupying army.  
More ambitious are  
the expeditions intent on conquest  
Since Hillary and Tenzing  
first reached the summit,  
nearly 150 men and women  
have stood on Everest.  
In Kathmandu there is  
a growing list of other teams  
booking dates on which  
they too can attempt to  
climb Everest or a score  
of other peaks.  
Everywhere the sound  
of the saw is heard.  
Hillary tells of its impact.  
"I believe the problem of  
conservation in the Khumbu area  
is a very serious one indeed.  
There are literally dozens

of small hotels  
being constructed with the view  
to supplying accommodation  
to walkers and trekkers  
and climbers.  
This has put  
a very considerable pressure  
on the local timber resources.  
In the old days the Sherpas  
used to have very strict rules  
about where they cut firewood,  
and how much they cut.  
And the whole society was well  
balanced ecologically.  
All that has changed.  
Nowadays most of the upper valleys  
have been completely denuded  
and many of the forests have  
been thoroughly thinned out."  
As the Sherpas are learning,  
their mountain homeland is  
astonishingly fragile.  
Not only in the Khumbu  
but throughout Nepal,  
trees are being cut  
at a devastating rate  
one third the nation's forest  
in the last decade.  
Already ravished slopes are  
bringing disastrous penalties.  
No longer held by trees,  
landslides are destroying terraces  
built by centuries  
of patient labor,  
have even swept away  
or buried entire villages.  
With the help of  
Hillary's Himalayan Trust,  
at least one resident is being  
banished from the Khumbu parklands.  
Relentless foragers of seedlings  
and low vegetation,  
goats long have threatened  
the slow-growing shrubs

and trees of the high country.  
Now Hillary, too, joins in a great  
goat roundup with Mingma Norbu,  
warden of the Sagarmatha National  
park on the flanks of Everest.  
From the scattered slopes almost  
five hundred goats at last  
are gathered near Namche Bazar  
and driven to the less vulnerable  
lowlands in the south.  
At park headquarters,  
Warden Mingma Norbu leads  
an intensifying  
effort to save  
the Khumbu from calamity.  
A student in the first school  
built at Khumjung  
over twenty years ago,  
he is a proud example of the  
education made possible by Hillary  
Now, speaking both Nepali and  
occasional English,  
he teaches a new generation  
of Sherpa children  
to recognize the evidence of  
damaged trees  
and erosion on the scarred  
landscape around them.  
He stresses the critical  
importance of tree nurseries  
and the need for  
a wider program of reforestation  
protecting not only  
their fragile world,  
but Sherpa culture itself.  
Celebrated in a museum photograph,  
the climbing of Everest  
by Hillary and Tenzing  
hastened the changes  
taking place in Nepal.  
Now on the thirtieth anniversary  
of that historic event,  
the Khumbu is no longer  
an island lost in time.

Yet the past sends emissaries.  
Announced by the beat of drums,  
ancient protectors of  
their Tibetan ancestors  
appear amid the villagers  
assembled at Khumjung School.  
Believed to be the guardians  
of the four gates of Earth,  
"snow lions" have come down  
from the icy summits  
to dance and cavort for  
the honored guests.  
While the conquerors of Everest  
sample the home-brewed chang  
of the village women,  
the school staff prepares a lesson  
on how mountains really  
should be climbed.  
As the guests should know,  
a little chang steadies the nerves,  
helps blur the dangers and  
difficulties that lie ahead.  
A helping hand is  
always appreciated.  
Pace yourself.  
The steeper the slope,  
the more rest you need.  
Try not to trip on a tangled rope.  
The fall may be  
farther than you think.  
When altitude sickness strikes,  
a whiff of oxygen can work wonders.  
When lost, look for the summit.  
That's where you're going.  
In the final assault on the last  
gale-swept ridge, don't lose heart.  
"I'm going to die.  
I'm going to die."  
"Okay"  
"Thank you very much."  
Celebrating one journey,  
Hillary begins another.  
From Khumjung School  
he leads a climb of children.

Bearing seedlings of fir  
and rhododendron from  
Sagarmatha's nurseries,  
the students of Khumjung school  
are bringing back growth  
to the blighted slopes  
below Everest.  
Helped by Hillary as  
they commit roots to soil,  
they are part of  
a new children's crusade,  
not to seek redemption in heaven,  
but to renew life on Earth.  
Around Hillary stand  
the silent witnesses  
of the journey he began long ago  
Ama Dablam, Kantega,  
Thamserku, Everest  
the summit where he and Tenzing  
once left a bit of chocolate  
and a few biscuits.  
Today he has brought a richer gift  
the small beginnings of  
a new woodland,  
the little trees protect  
by the prayers of children.  
But the answer to prayers often  
lies in those who pray.  
In the opening minds of  
Khumbu's children  
lies a measure of  
their world to come.  
In them Sir Edmund Hillary  
long ago  
found something more satisfying,  
more enduring,  
than leaving a footprint  
on a mountaintop.