



## HERE WE GO AGAIN

*“I find I’m so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head. I think it’s the excitement that only a free man can feel. A free man at the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain.”*

– Red from *Shawshank Redemption*

I remember going to the gym, listening to a melancholy song, October Project’s *Return to Me*. I was doing the StairMaster with tears running down my face. After a serious time of reflection about my dad, it was again time to look forward. I had seven weeks to go.

It’s funny how time just accelerates and gets compacted. It’s the Venturi effect in your life. It’s hard because you have to prepare for all the things that are going to come up. After

March 18, when the plane leaves, there's nothing more that can be done to get ready for Everest or in my personal and business life.

I always liked that quote from the *Shawshank Redemption*, where Red is talking about the start of a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain. That sums up adventure. I knew people had gone up this trail before. Climbing the south side of Everest wasn't new, but it was new to me. I hadn't been up those last 3,000 feet.

This time I was more resolved. The trepidation from the previous trip was replaced by joy and excitement to get going and get back at it. I knew I was going to enjoy the trek more. I wasn't worried about the Maoists. I was there to enjoy it from the get-go. The angst and worry—all that energy spent on the worry—was gone. The first time was nervous and exciting. This time was just exciting.

Mark Holbrook, an old friend, was going to make the trek into Base Camp with me. My only real worry was he hadn't been that high before. He'd done a couple of 14ers 30 years ago. To get ready for the trek, he'd done one backpacking trip in the Adirondacks. I have this propensity to wax poetic, "Dude, you'll love it. You should go." I got him all jazzed on it. He was in his early 50s at the time. He worked out. But his real experience had been a two- or three-night outing in the Adirondacks. I felt a teeny bit nervous for him.

We left on March 19, flying from Rochester to New York City. This time there were no tears at the airport. I don't want to say it was more casual, but it was more casual. "OK, I'm going back to Everest."

Maggie did tell me I still owed her 36 years. When we got married, we joked that this was a 50-year deal and then

we'd see if we wanted to renew for another 50. At this point, we'd been married 14 years.

From New York, we flew to Vancouver and then to Hong Kong, Bangkok and finally Kathmandu. The Cathay Pacific computer system went down worldwide so they had to check in everyone manually. Our flight left JFK about two and one half hours late. I wasn't worried about getting there; I was worried about my baggage getting there. You can't replace that stuff. But where the last time I was freaking, this time I expected it to work out.

We arrived in Hong Kong at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, March 21. Our flight on Cathay Pacific to Bangkok was scheduled to leave at 9:05 a.m. and it did. However, a Cathay rep met us outside our gate and explained that she'd booked us on the next available flight on Thai Airways. It was not a problem, but they said there was an issue with our baggage. They couldn't locate our stuff. Great. My worst fears were being realized.

Thirty minutes later they came back to us and said, "We've found three of your four bags." I turned to Holbrook and said, only half-kidding, "I hope they're missing yours."

Actually, they had the fourth bag, but it didn't have a tag on it. However, it was clearly marked with my name, so they told me someone from the airline had to escort me out on the tarmac to identify it. They took me down two flights of stairs to the ramp beneath the massive underbelly of our 747. What a thrill that was. Dang, I don't know how those big airplanes get off the ground—and I'm a pilot.

Not long after that we were back on our way. I watched my last bag get loaded onto the plane. What a relief. Everything was going to be OK.