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### A Wedding Remembered, an Acquaintance Renewed

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Twenty years after their paths intersected at *her own* wedding near the world's tallest mountain, Dallas Tax senior manager **Sara Stanford** and New York Audit associate **Jigme Sherpa** reconnected this week -- through KPMG Today.

"It's crazy, very exciting," Sherpa says.

"Really amazing," echoes Stanford.

The virtual reunion occurred over email and on the [Hub](#) when Stanford, after reading an [initial article about Sherpa](#), posted her sole wedding photo hoping he could identify the monk who officiated.

He did. It was his father. And the little boy in the photo?

"That was *me* in the green jacket," Sherpa marvels.

The subsequent conversation between Sherpa and Stanford was surprising, memorable and totally engaging.

"We talked about her wedding and career at KPMG," Sherpa adds, "as well as about her trip to Nepal and mine to the United States."



Sara and John Stanford at left, with Jigme Sherpa, then 8 years old, joining the wedding ceremony 20 years ago.

#### The Sherpa Cause



Sara Stanford with her husband John Stanford.

Stanford is a native of the U.K and 15-year KPMG veteran who was among many colleagues deeply moved by the plight of the 16 climbers killed in the worst Mt. Everest avalanche in history. To date, KPMG donors have pledged more than \$1000 to a collection drive for the victims' survivors that Sherpa is helping spearhead through the US Nepal Climbers Association.

The April 18 disaster sparked a worldwide call for compensation for the many Sherpa families who lost their main breadwinners in an area where few other employment options are available. Everest guides (whose profession bears the name of the local Sherpa ethnic group) pursue one of the riskiest jobs on earth, yet their families collect paltry sums when the porters are killed or disabled on the mountain, an all-too-frequent occurrence.

For the Stanfords, whose wedding was witnessed by their three Sherpa guides, the disaster hit particularly close to home. In 1995, their porters helped them complete a rugged three-week trek to Kalapathar, an 18,000 feet peak close to the Everest Base camp. The area is too steep for any mechanical vehicles and is on one of the main trails to the summit. Along the way the couple stopped at the village of Pangboche, (13,000 feet above sea level and surrounded by Himalayan Mountains) for their nuptials, where the most esteemed local monk presided.

#### High-altitude Romance

For the Stanfords, who first met skydiving, it was an appropriate venue.

John Stanford was a professional skydiving instructor, Sara was the student and it was love at first sight when she took her first jump. By the time John retired in 2005, he had logged well over 4,000 jumps to Stanford's nearly 2,000. The pair naturally preferred locations that were far off -- and *well above* -- the beaten path, so they sought a decidedly *unconventional* venue for their wedding.

"I come from the U.K and my husband grew up in Colorado and was living in Texas. We knew we'd have logistical problems if we tried to do one wedding and we definitely didn't want to do two. We were also afraid someone would feel left out or offended. So we checked out Nepal, because John had always wanted to take photos of Everest," she recalls.

With the actual date of their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary fast approaching, Sara and John Stanford are now considering a return to the country and the man who first blessed their happy union. Whether they go or not, Stanford knows that her new Nepalese connection will last a lifetime.

"Jigme and I will definitely stay in touch," she says. "This whole thing is pretty incredible."

Written by [Sue Treiman](#).



Approved By Bruce Pfau