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KPMG's Sherpa Copes with a Mountainous Tragedy

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When the worst accident in Everest history recently claimed 16 lives, it left KPMG's **Jigme Sherpa** deeply bereft and profoundly determined.

A native of Pangboche, a rural town nestled along the main road to the Mt. Everest summit, the 28-year-old New York Audit associate knew several victims of the latest disaster - and grew up amongst those disabled and devastated by previous climbing accidents. The experience left him with a keen understanding of the dangers associated with the job that bears his family name.

"Two of the 16 latest victims were from my town. One had a four-year old son, a wife and an elderly mother to take care of who'll now have no breadwinner. They were offered too little money from the government to survive. I don't know what will happen," Sherpa worries.

Now living in Queens, New York, Sherpa spent his childhood among mountain climbers, the youngest son of a respected Buddhist monk who regularly bestowed blessings (and a lucky amulet) on many of the intrepid travelers. Lama Geshe's respect for the peak convinced him to forbid his own children from summiting. But the tiny hamlet of Pangboche offered few other options for young people.



Jigme Sherpa and fiancée Mingma Phuti Sherpa pose with Mt. Everest

Few choices

"In our town, there are two things you can do. You can either become a Sherpa, which is extremely risky, and my own parents would not allow it anyway, or you could run a local inn, which requires capital," Sherpa says.

Pursuing any other path required unbelievable grit and determination - amidst formidable obstacles.



Sherpa's village along the main road to the Mt. Everest summit

"To continue our schooling when our local primary ended in the fifth grade, my sister and I would leave Monday morning for a five-hour walk to the nearest school in Khumjung. We'd stay in town and make the long uphill walk home every Friday, which took at least six hours," he recalls.

Later, the siblings transferred to the Shridiwa International School in Kathmandu, accessible via a two-day trek by foot, an overnight stay and an airplane flight. They were only able to make the trip home once a year.

His sister left after 10th grade but Sherpa, interested in math and familiar with the vast possibilities in other countries, wanted more. He'd heard about America through his father's friend and devotee, climber Jim Williams.

"So many Westerners were coming to the base camp in our town and stopping to see my father that we'd hear all about what they did and what the lifestyle was like. I knew I wanted that," Sherpa says.

American connection

With Williams as his mentor, Sherpa attended Nazareth College and Syracuse University in New York state, interned at KPMG in summer of 2012 and joined the firm's New York office soon thereafter. Now a valued member of the US Liquid Holdings Group and Daiwa/ NY FS/ Banking group, he is considered a consummate professional - and a valued member of the local Nepalese community.

He recently served as on-camera spokesman when **NBC news visited the monastery** as he comforted friend Pasang Kanchi Sherpa on the loss of her brother Then Dorji Sherpa.

Sherpa is helping spearhead a collection drive for the climbers' families through the newly established US Nepal Climbers Association Inc. He, and fellow Nepalese, hope to one day offer their countrymen an alternative to the risks of the mountain.

"The government of Nepal earns millions from the tourists and the Sherpas make it possible for these people to climb. And yet, the guides get only a tiny portion of the money. It's outrageous and upsetting," Sherpa says.

His own aspirations may never take him up a mountain, but Sherpa has a very definite sense of what would constitute a peak *career* experience.

"It may be in 15 years or more, but my ultimate goal is to work towards job creation in Nepal. I want to go back and figure out a way to make more and better schools available and to create many more opportunities for people," says Sherpa.

To find out how to contribute to the cause, contact [Sherpa](#).



Approved By Bruce Pfau