

High hopes

IN MAY, DR KUMARAN RASAPPAN, 28, FULFILLED HIS DREAM TO CLIMB MT EVEREST, THE WORLD'S HIGHEST MOUNTAIN. INTERVIEW NIRMALA SIVANATHAN



“YOU WOULD THINK I WOULD BE USED

to the sight of a dead body. But when I saw the first of four frozen corpses on my way to the summit of Mt Everest in Nepal, it reminded me of my own mortality. Several climbers die every year and their bodies are just left there. At first, I thought the corpse was just ‘resting’, but after a few minutes I realised he wasn’t moving! I was shaken.

I was introduced to the idea of mountaineering by a schoolmate in 2008. An exchange student from Romania, she had climbed Mt Aconcagua, the highest mountain in Argentina. Looking at her photographs, it struck me that if she could climb a mountain, then why couldn’t I?

I did a search online for the easiest, highest mountain to climb. The search threw up Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, the highest peak in Africa. So, after a month’s training, I headed there during a school break that year. During the climb, I realised that there is no such thing as ‘an easy mountain.’ I thought then, I am never doing this again!

In 2009, when studying for my MBBS, I made the decision to scale Everest. But I didn’t get to act on it because I had no money to begin with.

I was admitted into the Tan Tock Seng Hospital (TTSH) residency training programme after I graduated in 2010. After 14 months, in early 2011, at the end of my transitional year — which is the period before trainees start training in their chosen speciality areas — I acted on my dream, and took a year off to train for Mt Everest.

I was the only Singaporean in an expedition of 30 climbers. We waited for more than two weeks at the base camp to start the climb. There is a window of a few weeks each spring when the weather on Mt Everest improves enough for climbers to make the trek to the top. I started out on the summit push with a guide on 21 May, and five days later reached the top. Moments before reaching the summit, I realised the immensity of what I was trying to achieve. But I was so tired when I got to the top, all I could think about then was making it back to base camp, a journey that would take two days.

I wanted to make my climb more meaningful by tying it to a cause close to my heart — the TTSH Charity Fund. To date, I’ve raised almost \$30,000 for the fund, through donations made to the fund’s Fund webpage and my blog climbeverest2012.wordpress.com.” LW

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IS WITH TTSH'S DEPARTMENT
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