

"Jesus Motherf\*\*\*\*\* Christ" I yelled "God D\*\*\*, Son of a B\*\*\*\*\*" even louder I screamed, followed by "S\*\*\*!" Running out of expletives I started all over again crying out to God or whoever what a lousy father I was to bring Maura my 27 year old daughter here under the ridge of Ganga La (La meaning pass in Tibetan).

In a guide book on Nepal Treks, it had listed this effort as "One of the hardest most outback passes available to a trekker." At 16805 feet it was not on a main route nearby any villages or hotels. The guy in the trekking agency in Kathmandu said "No problem- 20 dollars a day per person for tents, guide and 2 porters" I thought 'Sure' and to Maura.. "Let's go!"

Prem Bahadur Gurung was our short stout ever smiling, hardly any English speaking guide. "No problem, I been that way," he repeated. Lal and Ramesh were our 2 young good looking porters who carried big full bamboo basket dokos on their backs with tents and kerosene and stove and food for all of us. Maura and I had to carry our own backpacks with clothes, cameras and sleeping bags geared toward winter in November at high elevation.

A small van took us 25 minutes outside of Kathmandu to Sundarijal where we started the climb up stone and cement stairs for hours. Next day we dropped into the Melanchi river valley of Helambu. We walked thru fields on small farmers paths and forded a stream pants legs rolled up. Down along this river route heading up towards the ridge where Tarke Gyang sat we avoided spider webs across the trail with fist sized thin legged spiders- waiting. We saw young boys selling persimmons from their yard. We saw school kids lined up for morning formation and song/prayer recitations and we saw Prem once throwing his arms up and back and turning to us "Stop!" His arms spread out wide then the two hands with thumbs together made a circle 6 or 8 inches across and then his hand and arm made a wriggling motion pointing down in the bushes near our feet.

At the Sherpa village we nighted and started off at 0700 next morning straight up the ridge. "Where 's the trail?" I asked Maura. Huffing and puffing an hour later she answered "I don't see it either." Straight up, pulling ourselves with tree roots at face level this sweat drenched goat path was 'Commando training". The effort took all of our early morning energy and once on top there was little rest. Through this high forest, fog shrouded flatish area Prem was whistling and whistling for an hour or so. Finally, I asked him, "Why the noise?" He turned to me very seriously and said simply, "Tigers, they hear, maybe they go away." "Oh."

4,6,8 hours and still no homes, villages, cabins and we were out of drinking water. 10 hours now and dark it was. Two headlamps among the 4 of us stumbling over bushes and boulders. 12 hours of walking up at 12,000 feet now at least. I had previously some hours earlier felt in the fog and endorphin of exercise so light footed it seemed I was flowing, flying, floating above the trail. It was blissful.. for awhile. Nearing 8:00 PM the porters were listening for water, for the sounds of a creek or a burbling spring. We needed water, had to have water. Finally after 13 hours of trekking we stopped at a Yak Karka, a herder's stone house with bamboo woven roof. The water was found close by and stoves soon were cooking rice and vegetables. Firewood was almost impossible to find because only bushes existed at this level. During my dreamless sleep I heard a knocking sound, crunching teeth or something and in the morning I found goose down fluff all over my sleeping bag that had now a good sized hole chewed in it.

Next day after hours of bush wacking , upwards toward the basin backside of Ganga La I noticed a line of people contouring quite quickly high above in the same direction. "The trail is up there, Prem," I said pointing. "I thought you knew the way." He answered " I never been this far before. Snow turned us back 2 years ago," "Oh."

The next day we arrived at south base camp and decided not to stop since it was only 1100 AM and the La seemed right over there above the glacial basin. So, on we went over and up and over a boulder filled caldera like section that would have been an ankle breaker with just 4 inches of snow but the weather held and we thought we had it made cresting a ridge at 3 o'clock. Heart breaker, it was a false summit. There, way up there, was the pass and nothing to do but continue across the 15,000 feet and more route with little sign of a trail. Just up, up to ..there ..the La.

Below our high point still and it was getting late and we all were struggling and suffering up the scree slope scrambling. This is where I needed the angry energy of cursing. Since I could see Maura was near tears under her pack, head down sounding like a horse that had been run hard.

"Lal, Ramesh, throw out part of the kerosene and water and rice." Prem commanded. "You're going too slow and we can't be up here or near the top of back side of Ganga La in the dark." He said it in Nepali with urgency and I saw them immediately stop and empty weight from their baskets.

At 4 o'clock we summited if you can call it that. The pass is the only low accessible way between Naya Kanga and another huge snow covered mountain on the right. We celebrated for all of 5 minutes and "Time to go," Prem said. But here the trail visible now was only 8 inches across as it skirted a drop off 600 feet straight down. I stopped, balked like a horse afraid of water. "Holy S\*\*\*." My legs were already shaking and rubbery. Prem went head the 20 feet of exposed cliff and we passed our packs and baskets to him one at a time. He was smiling tightly and encouraged us "Come come, no problem." I looked not down anymore but straight ahead and grabbed his hand and knew right then we had picked the right guide. "Thank you " Maura and I said as finished with the tight rope walk we began scrambling down the scree slope side by side going down. Finally going toward the big boulder way below which had small level places tent sized to camp. Side by side under our packs we almost ran down feeling like 2 lions hunting the veld of Serengeti. We had done it . We were strong now and unafraid.

In the lodge at Chenzig Gompa the next day I heard the other guides talking over rum with Prem Bahadur( it means strong heart) in Nepali and noticed one look up and point in the mountains directly and say 'Ganga La?' and Prem nodded and they looked at us and nodded several times—"Ganga La, good."