**YMCA Board Member and daughter trek to Mount Everest Base Camp**

One need not delve too deeply into history to see a certain, consistently demonstrated pattern of human behavior. Through centuries of time, we human beings have expressed an irrepressible thirst for exploration.

From Christopher Columbus, who sailed across the mysterious dark ocean to modern day space explorers, who as I write today, have just discovered a new planet, we thirst to test our limits; be they physical or mental. We must know what is beyond that which we now know, and we will not sit idly on the sidelines waiting for discoveries to fall our way; we march forward with utter determination and unquenchable curiosity.

Of course, some of us are more adventuresome than others. Regardless of what prompts us towards adventure, the fact is that only a small fraction of people would ever try to climb to 17,600 feet; base camp at Mount Everest. Yet, that is exactly what one of our very dedicated YMCA of Greater Westfield members, who also serves on our Board of Directors, and her ambitious young daughter did this past October. Clarissa and Bailey Simone made a successful trek to base camp of Mount Everest after seven days of arduous hiking. In total, they walked 22 days.

In preparation for the trip, Clarissa, who normally works out twice a day at the Y, three times a week, increased her workouts and took a number of serious treks up New England's highest mountains. Bailey, had a good base, from all of her hiking in the mountains of Colorado where she lives.

Their journey began in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Clarissa had traveled from the U.S., taking a one-month leave from her job at Roger Butler Insurance Agency in Westfield. Her daughter, Bailey, on a six-month leave from her job as an environmental engineer in Boulder, Colorado, had just completed a four- month internship as an environmental engineer in Cambodia, studying and working on the issue of arsenic contamination.

After a few days in the capital city, the pair flew to Lukla airport where they began their trek. Though many folks hike the Everest region in large trekking groups, Clarissa and Bailey decided to make the trek on their own; hiring a guide to lead them up the mountain. Each night, after four to eight hours of walking, they would stay in tea houses; very Spartan hotels, with guest rooms constructed entirely of plywood. The outhouses at the hotels consisted mostly of four walls and a ceramic hole in the ground. In the tea house dining rooms, there always was a wood stove, fueled by wood or Yak dung and run for a few hours each night; just enough to take the chill off.  Meals were simple, and the

menu never varied from tea house to tea house; generally a Sherpa stew, ramen noodle soup, carrots and potatoes and Yak cheese.

Once they reached base camp, they took some side trips to Chhukhung and Cho La pass, an area which required crossing a glacier and later, negotiating down a very steep and rocky pathway. These offered majestic views, which were equally matched later with a visit to the Goyko Lakes; glimmering, green, glacier-colored lakes surrounded by white-capped mountains.

For Clarissa and Bailey, standing together, as mother and daughter, amidst the astounding beauty of the Himalayan mountains was truly an amazing experience for both, and one that will undoubtedly remain indelibly marked in their memories. Bailey expressed to me how lucky she felt to have shared this trip with her mom. She said, "We got to experience the high points such as reaching Everest base camp as well as the more challenging aspects of the trip such as the end of a long day of climbing, together. It was also great to see my mom removed from her stressful day-to-day life and subjected to the slower, more relaxed pace of trekking. I was really impressed with how hard she trained before the trip and how well she functioned outside her comfort zone in Nepal. She's one tough mom!"

The physical and mental challenges were significant, especially hiking at such a high altitude. It required a slower pace and many stops along the way to give their lungs time to adjust to the thin air. The air was quite cold and Clarissa developed a cough that commonly occurs in hikers at this altitude. In general, though, besides sun-blistered lips and blistered feet, the pair remained healthy and strong throughout the trip.

When I asked Clarissa what she's learned about herself from the trip, she thought for a moment and shared the following, "In hitting a certain milestone in my life at age 50, I see myself making some changes. I'm not sure what changes those might be, but I do feel a desire to do some more travel and to have a little more quiet time. Spending time in another culture outside the United States, you see that much of the world doesn't operate at the pace we do. It makes you think about your own life and how you want to spend your time."

Fortunately for Clarissa, spending a good deal of time working out at the Y, gave her the physical capacity to successfully tackle such a demanding endeavor. Having heard her story of exploration and discovery, I'd said it was time very well spent.

Rosann Scalise

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