

  
TRANSMISSION  
Presents

# SHERPA

From the producer of *TOUCHING THE VOID* and *127 HOURS*

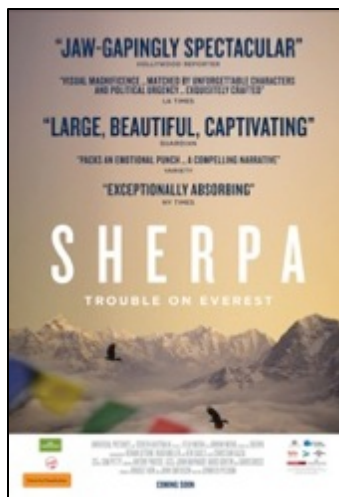
**BAFTA Nominee: Best Documentary 2016**

**WINNER: Grierson Award for Best Documentary Feature - BFI London Film Festival**

## PRODUCTION NOTES

Opens in cinemas across Australia **MARCH 31, 2016**

~ Advance screenings **25<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2016** ~



Directed by **Jennifer Peedom**

Produced by **Bridget Ikin** and **John Smithson**

**Running time:** 96 minutes

**Classification:** CTC

**PUBLICITY REQUESTS:**

Transmission Films Australia / Corey Te Wharau

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**Distributed in Australia by Transmission Films**



## **KATHMANDU AND INTREPID TRAVEL PARTNER WITH THE AWARD WINNING FILM 'SHERPA' TO HELP REBUILD NEPAL**

While Nepal continues to struggle with the aftermath of last year's devastating earthquake, leading travel and adventure retailer **Kathmandu**, and **Intrepid Travel**, the small group adventure travel company, have partnered with the award winning documentary film SHERPA to raise funds to help rebuild the country's economy, infrastructure and tourism industry.

Kathmandu and Intrepid Travel will each host a series of preview screenings around Australia to raise funds to go to the Australian Himalayan Foundation (AHF) and Intrepid's Namaste Nepal Appeal.

Kathmandu's Brand Manager Tim Loftus said: "The Australian Himalayan Foundation was founded in 2002 with the aim of making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of the people of the Himalayas. Kathmandu became community partners with the AHF in 2011, in recognition and support of the region that inspired the brand. This partnership with the film SHERPA gives Kathmandu the opportunity to further highlight and support education and rebuilding programs in Nepal."

Intrepid Travel Co-Founder Darrell Wade said: "Tourism is vitally important to Nepal's recovery – it is the largest employer in Nepal – and it has obviously taken quite a hit since last year's earthquake. While international fundraising efforts played an important part in helping rebuild the country, we now have to focus on encouraging tourists to return to Nepal for its long-term economic well-being. Nepal wants travellers back – its trails are safe and open, its mountains still beautiful and the people as welcoming as ever. The best way for Australians to help Nepal is to visit and we hope to spread this message through our partnership with SHERPA.

"Funds raised from Intrepid's screenings of SHERPA will go towards our Namaste Nepal Appeal, which was launched immediately after the earthquake, and supports local and international NGOs in Nepal, including World Wildlife Fund, Plan International, Himalayan Rescue Foundation and Seven Women."

**To purchase tickets to the fundraising screenings visit:**

**Kathmandu** - <http://www.kathmandu.com.au/summit-club/events>

**Australian Himalayan Foundation**

<https://www.australianhimalayanfoundation.org.au/index.php/sherpa-pre-screening>

**Intrepid Travel** - <http://www.intrepidtravel.com/return-nepal>

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## **SUMMARY INFORMATION**

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UNIVERSAL PICTURES and SCREEN AUSTRALIA present

in association with DISCOVERY

a FELIX MEDIA and ARROW MEDIA production

### **KEY CREDITS/ BILLING BLOCK**

Director JENNIFER PEEDOM

Producers BRIDGET IKIN and JOHN SMITHSON

Executive producers JOHN MAYNARD, DAVID GRIFFIN and DAVID GROSS

Cinematography RENAN OZTURK, HUGH MILLER and KEN SAULS

Sound recordist NICK EMOND

Editor CHRISTIAN GAZAL

Sound designer SAM PETTY

Composer ANTONY PARTOS

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## **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

Digital Cinema Package

Duration: 96 minutes

Sound: Stereo Mix / 5.1

Aspect Ratio: 2:35:1

## SYNOPSIS

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### Sherpa

'ʃə:pə/

*noun*

1. An ethnic group: a Himalayan people living on the borders of Nepal and Tibet
2. A job description: renowned highly-skilled high-altitude workers in the Himalayas.

### SHORT SYNOPSIS

A fight on Everest? It seemed incredible. But in 2013 news channels around the world reported an ugly brawl at 21,000ft as European climbers fled a mob of angry Sherpas.

In 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay had reached the summit in a spirit of co-operation and brave optimism. Now climbers and Sherpas were trading insults – even blows. What had happened to the happy, smiling Sherpas and their dedication in getting foreigners to the top of the mountain they hold so sacred?

Determined to explore what was going on, the filmmakers set out to make a film of the 2014 Everest climbing season, from the Sherpas' point of view. Instead, they captured a tragedy that would change Everest forever.

At 6.45am on 18th April, 2014, a 14 million ton block of ice crashed down onto the climbing route through the Khumbu Icefall, killing 16 Sherpas. It was the worst tragedy in the history of Everest.

The disaster provoked a drastic reappraisal about the role of the Sherpas in the Everest industry. SHERPA, tells the story of how, in the face of fierce opposition, the Sherpas united in grief and anger to reclaim the mountain they call Chomolungma.

## ONE PAGE SYNOPSIS

A fight on Everest? It seemed incredible. But in 2013 news channels around the world reported an ugly brawl at 21,000ft as European climbers fled a mob of angry Sherpas.

In 1953, New Zealander Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay had reached the summit in a spirit of co-operation and brave optimism. Now climbers and Sherpas were trading insults – even blows.

What had happened to the ‘happy, smiling’ Sherpas and their dedication in getting foreigners to the top of the mountain they hold so sacred?

Determined to explore what was going on, we set out to make a film of the 2014 Everest climbing season, from the Sherpas’ point of view. We wanted to observe up-close, how and why the relationship between foreign climbers and Sherpas has shifted and soured since the euphoria of 1953.

We embedded with a commercial expedition run by hard-headed Himalayan veteran Russell Brice and his team of 25 climbing Sherpas. Brice has guided more expeditions on Everest than anyone, but he now finds himself trapped on a fault line between the aspirations of his clients and the assertive demands of his Sherpas. Crucial to Brice’s operation is his extraordinary Sherpa leader Phurba Tashi. We planned to cover Phurba’s world record-breaking attempt to summit Everest for the 22<sup>nd</sup> time.

Instead, we returned with hundreds of hours of footage from the most tragic - and transforming - week on Everest. If the fight on Everest in 2013 was a sign that the fuse had been lit on the uneasy relationship between Sherpas and foreigners, the events of the 2014 Everest climbing season would contain the powder keg that caused the whole thing to blow.

At 6.45am on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, a 14 million kg block of ice crashed down onto the climbing route through the Khumbu Icefall, killing 16 Sherpas. It was the worst tragedy in the history of Everest. What followed in the subsequent days would change the mountain forever.

The disaster provoked a drastic reappraisal about the role of the Sherpas. They work in the most dangerous service industry in the world. With few other economic opportunities available, supporting foreigners on their quest to climb Everest beckons as the most alluring, yet terrifying way of increasing prosperity for their families.

Shouldering disproportionate risk, they carry huge loads through the most treacherous part of the mountain, the Khumbu Icefall – a malevolent shifting river of ice. While Sherpas make up to 30 journeys through this deadly labyrinth, foreign climbers do it only twice.

Our team stayed at Base Camp as the raw emotion in the wake of the tragedy turned to bitter anger and resentment. All the tensions that had been building over previous years exploded into the thin air and played out in front of our cameras.

So our film SHERPA has evolved into the story of how the Sherpas united in grief and anger to reclaim the mountain they call Chomolungma, in the face of fierce opposition. Against the odds, they forced the closure of the mountain, and foreign climbers returned home, their dreams unfulfilled.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

At 6.45am on April 18, 2014, a massive block of ice crashes down onto the route used to get to the top of the ruggedly spectacular Mount Everest. It's the beginning of the climbing season and chaos ensues. There's no doubt that many are dead and little doubt that all of the dead will be Sherpas, the local people who enable western climbers to achieve their dreams of reaching the highest point on Earth.

\* \* \*

Twelve days earlier in his village of Khumjung, Phurba Tashi Sherpa is preparing for the annual influx of foreign climbers. He first got to the top of nearby Everest in 1999 and if he does so again this year he will make history by being the first person to summit the mercilessly dangerous mountain 22 times.

"My brother died on Everest last year," says Phurba's wife Karma Doma Sherpa, fighting back tears. "He went because he needed the money."

She confesses that she continually asks Phurba not to climb to the top of the mountain they call Chomolungma but he enjoys his work, and knows that his whole community financially benefits from the industry that's now centred on Everest. He acknowledges that in Sherpa culture the mountain is the mother god of Earth and some see it as wrong to walk on her head but he doesn't see it like that.

His mother does though. There's another reason she objects to what he's doing too: "If Phurba were a famous monk, at least we could get blessings. But the fame he gets from climbing the mountain is useless."

Sherpas are a distinct ethnic group but the word Sherpa became synonymous with climbing after Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary became the first men to summit Everest in 1953. The world was captivated by Tenzing's smiling, friendly demeanour but he was not recognised for his achievement to the extent that Hillary and the British expedition leader, Colonel John Hunt were.

\* \* \*

"If Phurba is one of the most successful Sherpas of his generation, then his counterpart amongst expedition leaders is his boss Russell Brice," proclaims highly regarded mountaineering writer Ed Douglas.

Up to 600 people reach the top of Everest annually. In 2014 Russell's well-regarded company, Himalayan Experience is one of 38 companies operating commercial expeditions on Everest; he's been operating there since 1994, and he's employed Phurba since 1998.

Climbers expect more and more creature comforts for the up to \$75,000 they pay for the experience of summiting Everest and this requires an extraordinary amount of effort by the facilitators. Thousands of kilograms of gear has to be hauled up to Base Camp each year by porters and yaks, for example, so that a tent village can be set up from scratch there – complete with flat-screen TVs, bars, portable showers.

"They (the Sherpas) may not still fully understand what it is that compels us to climb mountains but they are fantastically good at delivering the experience," says Ed Douglas.

“The way these commercial expeditions climb Everest is to establish a series of higher and higher camps (above Base Camp), stocking them over a period of weeks with everything required to give the clients the best chance of reaching the summit,” he explains. “The Government doesn’t permit equipment to be flown up the mountain so everything that goes into building these camps has to be carried and it’s the Sherpas that do that work, including going through (the) most dangerous section, the Khumbu Icefall.”

It is not possible to get to the summit of Everest from the south without crossing this treacherous river of ice. It’s full of deep crevasses and Ed says that climate change is increasing the dangers. Unlike the foreigners who might only go through the Khumbu Icefall twice, the Sherpas go through up to 30 times a season; Ed questions the moral justification of that.

But he’s not the only one very concerned about safety. Says Russell: “There is nowhere else in the world that a mountaineer would go through an icefall like it. I’m totally shit scared: every time I send the Sherpas up the mountain it’s like sending them off to war. I don’t know who’s going to come home.”

Russell’s paying customers include four people who’ve returned to try again, after they were unable to climb in 2012. Concerns about the stability of the icefall prompted Russell to cancel his expedition that year. This has added additional pressure in 2014.

“We wished that we could’ve gone up (in 2012) but we can’t risk our lives just because foreigners have paid to climb,” says Phurba.

In 2014 he is managing a team of 25 Sherpas for Russell and the responsibility weighs heavily. Before crossing the Khumbu Icefall for the first of many times in the next few weeks, the Sherpas perform a “puja” ritual. Permission to climb is sought, offerings are made to the gods and prayers are said, for protection of all.

“Safety is very, very important,” Russell emphasizes to the Sherpas before they leave. The Sherpa team will trek at night when the icefall is at its most stable, laden with oxygen tanks, tents, food, equipment, a toilet and everything else needed for the camp being set up above Base Camp, beyond the Khumbu Icefall.

“If you go through the icefall without crampons or if you go through the icefall without clipping on, I’m going to sack you. Even if it’s a full moon, you must have your headlamp.”

Meanwhile, Russell’s clients have arrived at Base Camp after their 10-day trek up from Khumjung and are preparing to leave for nearby Lobouche Peak. They will spend six days there – because the risks are not so great – acclimatising to the altitude.

\* \* \*

The block of ice that crashes down onto the Khumbu Icefall weighs an estimated 14,000 tons. At Base Camp everyone rushes to implement a rescue plan. Several Sherpas argue that they be included in the first helicopter load because they are best able to cope with the conditions but Russell is in charge of the helipad and overrules them, sending medical personnel first instead. The priority is tending to and evacuating the injured. In Sherpa culture if the bodies are not recovered too, reincarnation is impossible and the dead will not find peace.



“Seeing so many people die made me think of how, despite knowing the dangers, we continue to risk our lives for this job,” says Phurba the day after the avalanche. “All our family members are worried, so today we’re going home.”

No-one on his team was killed but it is a close-knit community and everyone feels the raw emotion of being on the mountain on its blackest day in history. An estimated 250 people have died on Everest overall but never before have as many as 16 died in one year – and certainly not on the same day.

The unease at Base Camp grows. At a big outdoor assembly, shocked and angry Sherpas call for the climbing season to be cancelled out of respect for the dead and their families.

Exposure to social media and more education means each new generation of Sherpas better understands how much credit foreigners get for climbing Everest and how little credit they get for taking most of the risks and doing the grunt work. And no-one has forgotten the ugly brawl that broke out in 2013 after European climbers acted disrespectfully towards the Sherpas. International media attention had been drawn to this very surprising – shocking – event, in which a group of angry Sherpas had retaliated towards the disrespectful climbers, throwing rocks at them. “The Sherpas tried to kill us”, the European climbers claimed. Now everyone was wondering: Would the memory of the brawl spill over into this year’s climbing season?

The Sherpas are also highly critical of the Nepalese Government, which gets royalties from the expedition companies but does not publicly recognise that the industry is built on the labour of the Sherpas – and on their lives. The Sherpas want the authorities to better compensate families when deaths occur and set minimum conditions for Nepalese nationals.

A memorial puja is held to honour the dead on the fourth day after the avalanche. Another meeting is held, and calls to cancel all expeditions intensify. Russell is invited to speak and reminds them that if they don’t work they will have no income for their families.

Away from the spotlight, Russell says it is only a couple of Sherpas who are stirring up trouble but not everyone agrees: Nepali operator Sumit Joshi says a growing tendency to ‘speak up’ is a result of Nepal becoming democratic in the 1990s.

Fuelled by international media reports that the Sherpas are threatening to boycott the 2014 season, Russell’s clients get restless and frustrated by the lack of official information.

Representatives of the Nepalese Government arrive at Base Camp six days after the tragedy to meet with hundreds of Sherpas but rather than taking a position, they tell the Sherpas they are free to make their own decisions.

“Nobody wants to climb, that I can guarantee,” says expedition doctor Nima Namgyal Sherpa. “The Sherpas, they’ll never complain. They’re just too loyal to the operators. They fear losing their jobs. This is where they make the most money, to feed their families for the rest of the year.”

Russell gathers his clients together and tells them the Government’s visit only escalated the uncertainty and that most expeditions have been cancelled. He also tells them that “four or five ... militant Sherpas” are saying they will beat up Russell’s Sherpas if they go through the icefall.

“As far as I know, our Sherpas want to climb but they fear for their lives,” he adds.

The next day Phurba arrives back at Base Camp from his village and immediately goes to the Sherpa briefing. Russell emphasizes that he is afraid for the Sherpas but, when questioned, Phurba says he has not heard of any threats. When Russell suggests that the expedition be cancelled, none of the Sherpas object. He can't afford the extra costs if only his expedition climbs, he adds as an afterthought, then in the same breath tells the Sherpas that their good reputation is being put at risk.

Russell tells his clients the news, this time saying that the Sherpas have been told that their legs will be broken if they go through the icefall. Phurba, sitting beside him, says nothing. The disappointment is palpable. Some of the clients are understanding; some not so. One accuses the “militant Sherpas” of being terrorists.

\* \* \*

Ed's interpretation of the events is that the Sherpas have “effectively cancelled the season” and “chose respect for themselves and the mountain ahead of money”. He also sees it as a welcome breathing space for Everest.

“Tenzing gave the name Sherpa a currency which will never be exhausted,” he says. “So it may only be now that they're really beginning to take advantage of it. They've got control of climbing the mountain and it's come full circle in a way.”

Tenzing Norgay's son, Jamling Tenzing Sherpa, muses on the legacy of his famous father too: “My father says ‘you don't conquer these mountains’, you know; ‘you just crawl up, as a child crawling onto your mother's lap’. It is the same approach I think people should take and there will be less accidents.”

Back in his village Phurba blesses and decorates his yaks. He has decided that if the foreigners stop coming to Nepal, he'll survive by farming cattle like his father and grandfathers did.

“If there hadn't been an accident this year and I'd gone to the top I would have climbed Everest 22 times. But if I go to the mountain and my family isn't happy, then there is no benefit in earning that money. I would rather not hold the record and live with a healthy body and a happy family. So I will stop climbing now.”

## CREATIVE TEAM – BIOS & CVS

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### JENNIFER PEEDOM

*Director, Writer and Co-producer*

#### BIO

Jen Peedom is known for her intimate and compassionate portraits, documenting stories from the epic to the everyday, often in extreme situations. Her credits include the internationally renowned documentaries MIRACLE ON EVEREST and SOLO.

Jen is an experienced climber, and has worked as a high altitude director on several expeditions including Discovery Channel's six-part series EVEREST: BEYOND THE LIMIT. She has developed a strong friendship with Sherpa people over many years of working in the Himalayas since 2004, and these connections were key to the access we were granted in the making of SHERPA.

Her awards include an Australian Film Institute and Film Critics Circle Award for Best Documentary, multiple Australian Directors Guild Awards for Best Direction, and a 'Rocky' at the World Media Awards.

Jen was also awarded the inaugural David and Joan Williams Documentary Fellowship, which recognises and rewards creative ambition, intellectual rigour and innovation in documentary cinema. Jen has directed for ABC, SBS, BBC, France 5, ITVS, Discovery Channel and National Geographic Channel.

#### FILM / TV CV - KEY CREDITS

LIFE AT 9 (2014) – Series Director  
Screened ABC

LIFE AT 7 (2012) – Series Director  
Screened ABC

LIVING THE END (2010) – Director/Producer  
1 hr documentary for SBS  
Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner, Best Social / Humanitarian documentary, BANFF World Media Festival, Canada, 2011; Nominated, Best documentary ATOM Awards Australia, 2011

MIRACLE IN THE DESERT (2009) – Director  
1 hr documentary for ABC, France 5 and National Geographic Channel (part of a 3 part series)

SOLO (2008) – Director/Producer

1 hr documentary for ABC, BBC, National Geographic Channel US and ITVS

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner, Best Direction in a documentary, Australian Screen Directors Guild Awards, 2010; Winner, AFI Award for Best Documentary Under One Hour, 2009; Winner, Film Critics Circle Award for Best Documentary Under One Hour, 2010; Winner, Best Film Edinburgh Mountain Film Festival, 2010; Winner, Grand Prix, Prague International film festival - Water, Sea and The Oceans; Winner, Best film on Mountain Sport, BANFF Mountain Film Festival; Winner Grand Prix, Festival du Film Voyage & Adventure, Montreal Canada; Official Selection - Sheffield International Documentary Festival, UK; Official Selection - IDFA, International Documentary Festival Amsterdam; Official Selection - Adelaide International Film Festival;

MIRACLE ON EVEREST (2007) – Director/Producer

1 hr documentary for ABC, France 5 & National Geographic Channel US

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Screened at over 10 international film festivals, Bulgaria-Winner of the Bansko Municipality Award, International Mountaineering Film Festival, Peru-Winner, Best Mountaineering Film;

EVEREST: BEYOND THE LIMIT (2006) – High Altitude Director

6 x 1 hr documentary series

Broadcast, Discovery Channel US

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: The show aired worldwide in 2007 and was Discovery Channels' second most watched program in 2007

THE SHERPAS' BURDEN (2004) - Writer/Director

1 x 25 min documentary

Broadcast, SBS

## **BRIDGET IKIN**

*Producer*

### **BIO**

Committed to producing quality cinema of ideas, Bridget Ikin is an award-winning producer, whose feature films include: AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE; Alison Maclean's CRUSH; Clara Law's FLOATING LIFE; Sarah Watt's LOOK BOTH WAYS and MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX. She is the EP for the 2013 debut feature THE ROCKET (dir. Kim Mordaunt).

She has recently produced two series of the landmark documentary series on contemporary Aboriginal art, ART + SOUL, for the ABC. Bridget has also combined producing, with senior positions at the public broadcaster SBSi and the FFC (now Screen Australia).

More recently, Bridget and partner John Maynard have established Felix Media, a production company working with artists on exceptional moving image projects for cinema and gallery presentation. Recent works include CORAL by Lynette Wallworth, and CITIZENS BAND, and THE CALLING by Angelica Mesiti.

### **FILM / TV CV - KEY CREDITS**

ART + SOUL, series 2 (2014) – Producer  
3 x 1 hr documentary series, dir. Steven McGregor  
Screened ABC

THE ROCKET (2013) - Executive Producer  
Feature, dir. Kim Mordaunt  
Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner Berlin Film Festival, Amnesty International Film Prize, Best Debut Feature, Crystal Bear in Generation Kplus; Winner, Tribeca Film Festival, Audience Award; Winner, Sydney Film Festival, Audience Award; Winner AFI Fest Best International Film; Nominated, AACTA Awards, Best Film; Winner, Melbourne Film Festival, Audience Award

ART + SOUL, series 1 (2010) - Producer  
3 x 1 hr documentary series, dir. Warwick Thornton  
Screened ABC

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX (2009) - Producer  
Feature, dir. Sarah Watt  
Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Toronto Film Festival, Adelaide Film Festival, New Zealand International Film Festival, Edinburgh Film Festival

LOOK BOTH WAYS (2005) - Producer  
Feature, dir. Sarah Watt  
Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner, Toronto Film Festival, Discovery Award; AFI Award for Best Film; Winner, FIPRESCI Award, Brisbane Film Festival; Best Film – AFI Awards, Australia

FLOATING LIFE (1996) – Producer

Feature, dir. Clara Law

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Silver Leopard, Locarno Film Festival

CRUSH (1992) – Producer

Feature, dir. Alison Maclean

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: In Competition, Cannes Film Festival

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE (1990) - Producer

Feature; dir. Jane Campion

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Silver Lion, Venice Film Festival (and 8 other awards)

More than 20 international Best Film awards.

## **JOHN SMITHSON**

*Producer*

### **BIO**

John is one of the most respected executives working in worldwide factual production, with a distinguished track record in feature documentary. He is Joint Creative Director of ARROW MEDIA, one of the UK's fastest growing creative forces.

He has won more than 50 international awards for his TV and film work and has been responsible for a slate of high quality films that have received global acclaim.

In 2011 he was an Oscar® nominee for Best Motion Picture of the Year for Danny Boyle's 127 HOURS, a film he originated and produced. He also produced TOUCHING THE VOID, which won the BAFTA for Outstanding British Film and 14 other awards and broke box-office records.

He is currently in production on a large slate of projects for Arrow Media.

### **FILM/TV CV – KEY CREDITS**

9/11: HEROES OF THE 88<sup>th</sup> FLOOR (2012) – EP

Nominated for News & Documentary Emmy Award

INTO THE UNIVERSE WITH STEPHEN HAWKING (2011) – EP

Nominated for three News & Documentary Emmy Awards

I SHOULDN'T BE ALIVE (2010-2012) – EP

(44 episodes)

127 HOURS (2010) – Producer

Feature drama, dir. Danny Boyle

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Nominated for Best Picture Oscar®; Nominated, BAFTA, Alexander Korda Award for Best British Film; Winner, AFI Awards, Movie of the Year

THRILLER IN MANILLA (2009) – EP

TV movie documentary, dir. John Dower

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner George Foster Peabody Award; Winner Grierson Award for Best Historical Documentary; Winner Banff Television Festival Award for Best Sports Documentary; Nominated for News & Documentary Emmy Award,

9/11: PHONE CALLS FROM THE TOWERS (2009) – EP

TV movie documentary, dir. James Kent

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Nominated for International Emmy, Best Documentary

THE BECKONING SILENCE (2007) – EP

TV movie documentary, dir. Louise Osmond

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner, International Emmy Award, Best Documentary; Nominated BAFTA TV Award for Best Single Documentary.

DEEP WATER (2006) – Producer

Feature documentary, dir. Louise Osmond and Jerry Rothwell

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Grierson Awards for Best Cinema Documentary; Winner, Rome International Film Festival for Best Cinema Documentary; Winner, San Diego Film Critics Society Award for Best Documentary; Winner, Focal Award for Best Use of Footage in a Feature Length Documentary of Film.

9/11: THE FALLING MAN (2006) – EP

TV movie documentary, dir. Henry Singer

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Nominated for a BAFTA Award in Flaherty Documentary Award category; Nominated for International Emmy, Best Documentary; Winner, New York Festival World Gold Medal for Feature Length Documentary

THE LAST DRAGON (2004) – EP

Docufiction, dir. Justin Harvey

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Nominated for an Emmy, Outstanding Animated Program (For Programming One Hour or More)

TOUCHING THE VOID (2003) – Producer

Feature documentary, dir. Kevin Macdonald

Key Festivals/Awards/Acclaim: Winner, British Independent Film Award for Best British Documentary; Winner, Alexander Korda Award for Best British Film BAFTA Award



## **RENAN OZTURK**

*High Altitude Cinematographer + Director*

### **BIO**

Renan Ozturk is a globally recognized expedition climber, landscape artist and filmmaker. After many filming visits to Nepal, SHERPA was Renan's first Everest climbing/filming trip, and he'd been preparing for months for the ascent. His fluent Nepali, together with his imaginative and poetic use of the cameras at altitude were a genuine asset to the SHERPA team, and have lent the film an intuitive and intimate beauty.

Renan is at the forefront of the adventure cinematography and visual storytelling world, renowned for pushing the art of filmmaking from extreme locations. He's been recognized by North Face (as one of their professional athletes), and named as a National Geographic "Adventurer of the Year" (2012). Through top mountain film festival awards and online viral recognition, Renan's style has emerged as one of the leaders for the outdoor industry. He's a co-director of the ski movie INTO THE MIND, (2012), and was instrumental in the cinematography and direction of MERU (Sundance Audience Choice Award, 2015).

He co-founded the Camp 4 Collective to continue to push the boundaries of expedition storytelling.

### **FILM/TV CV – KEY CREDITS**

MERU (2015)

Cinematographer + subject

Sundance US Documentary Audience Choice Award, 2015

INTO THE MIND (2012)

Co-director

TOWERS OF THE ENNEDI

Best Climbing film, Boulder Adventure Film Festival

## KEY CHARACTERS

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### PHURBA TASHI SHERPA

#### BIO

Phurba Tashi (born 1971) lives in Khumjung, Nepal with his family. Phurba began by following in his father's footsteps as an expedition cook boy. He currently holds the joint world record for most ascents of Mt Everest (21). In 2007, he reached the top of the world three times in one season. His intention in 2014 was to summit two more times, thus establishing a new world record.

He also holds the record for most total ascents (30) of eight-thousanders (peaks above 8000m/26,247ft sea level).

Phurba has climbed over thirty 8000m summits - the most ever climbed by one person. He is Himalayan Experience's main climbing Sirdar (head Sherpa) and is often referred to as the "Everest Yak" because of his immense strength at altitude and superior logistical knowledge.

#### *Mountaineering CV – Key credits*

- 21 ascents of Mt Everest (joint world record)
- 5 ascents of Cho Oyo
- 2 ascents of Manaslu
- 1 ascent of Shishapangma
- 1 ascent Lhotse

### RUSSELL BRICE

#### BIO

New Zealander Russell Brice has been leading expeditions to the Himalayas since 1974, and he is the owner and operator of Himalayan Experience, the largest commercial expedition operator on Everest. He prides himself on his safety record, his success in supporting foreign climbers' aspirations on Everest and other mountains. Individually, he has the world record for the fastest single solo ascent without oxygen of both Cho Oyo and of Ama Dablam, and in 1988 became the first climber to cross the infamous Pinnacles of the NE ridge of Everest with Harry Taylor.

Russell is a member of the British Mountain Guides Association and Syndicat National des Guides de Montagne. He is also a co-founding Director of Friends of Humanity – a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping disadvantaged people in various parts of the world, and is a patron of Smile High – a charity with the vision of providing much needed dental services in remote parts of the world. He has assisted many film and TV companies to coordinate their Everest shoots.

## **ED DOUGLAS**

### **BIO**

Ed Douglas is a writer and journalist with a passion for the wilder corners of the natural world. A former editor of the *Alpine Journal*, Ed is an enthusiastic amateur climber and mountain traveller of over 30 years experience, with a particular interest in the Himalayas.

He is the author of *TENZING: HERO OF EVEREST* (2008), the first full-length biography of the first man, with Sir Edmund Hillary, to climb Everest. He is a regular writer for *The Guardian*.

He has a long standing interest in the Everest region His first book, *CHOMOLUNGMA SINGS THE BLUES: TRAVELS ROUND EVEREST*, detailed Sherpa-foreigner relationships and remains highly relevant.

### ***Writing CV – Key credits***

- *MOUNTAINEERS* (2011) – Editor
- *CAMPING* (2009) - co-authored with Katie Douglas
- *TENZING: HERO OF EVEREST* (2003) - Author
- *REGIONS OF THE HEART: THE TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY OF ALISON HARGREAVES* (1999)  
– co-authored with David Rose
- *CHOMOLUNGMA SINGS THE BLUES: TRAVELS ROUND EVEREST* (1997)
- *STATEMENT: the Ben Moon Story* (2015)

## PRODUCTION NOTES

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### GENESIS

For director Jen Peedom, SHERPA has been a 10-year journey, a journey she started back in 2004. She was directing a half-hour TV documentary; THE SHERPA'S BURDEN for the Australian broadcaster SBS, and the Sherpa people left a lasting impression on her. "I've always been interested in the Sherpas," says Jen, "I find the interrelationship between the expedition clients that come to climb Mt Everest, and the Sherpas who don't understand their dream fascinating. And for whatever reason that's drawn me back here yet again."

It was while high-altitude directing on the series EVEREST: BEYOND THE LIMIT in 2006, that Jen witnessed the Sherpa team save the lives of three clients who would have died, if not for the Sherpa team's capability and expertise. However, in the subsequent publicity, the clients hardly mentioned the Sherpas. "It was as if it would somehow lessen their achievement to acknowledge the role of the Sherpas," says Jen. "I found it deeply disturbing."

It was news of the decision by one of the major expedition operators to cancel their 2012 Everest climbing season that galvanized Jen to start developing the feature documentary SHERPA. Russell Brice, owner and operator of commercial Everest expedition company Himalayan Experience, controversially cancelled his expedition that year, citing dangerous conditions on the mountain. The decision was made on the advice of his expedition leader and head Sherpa, legendary mountaineer Phurba Tashi Sherpa, who believed that the conditions on Everest were too dangerous for climbers and his Sherpa team. Although no other expedition companies cancelled their expedition, Phurba's instincts proved right. That year, 11 climbers died, including three Sherpas.

### THE SHERPA'S STORY

For Jen, it was the right time to tell the story of the relationship between Sherpas and foreigners on Everest - from the Sherpas' point of view. "We set out to make a film that would document the 2014 climbing season, with the spine of the story to be Phurba Tashi's record-breaking ascent attempt. Everest is becoming increasingly crowded by inexperienced and naïve climbers wanting to stand on top of the world. And it's the Sherpas who play an increasingly vital role in putting clients on the summit and getting them down again safely," says Jen. "With social media, the Sherpas are aware that their efforts are not being acknowledged, once the climbers return home."

As well as to guide clients safely up and down the mountain during their summit attempts, commercial expeditions employ Sherpas to set the route, fix ropes and establish and stock camps up the mountain, with everything they need to give them the best chance of success, including food and oxygen. Between the Everest Base Camp and the summit, is the treacherous Khumbu Icefall. So as to establish comfortable camps above the Icefall for the foreign clients, the Sherpas are paid to carry loads through this dangerous part of the mountain - up to 30 times in a climbing season. They carry tents, kitchen equipment, chairs, gas bottles, oxygen, food, carpets, plastic flower decorations ... essential and non-essential items alike are all carried by Sherpas.

The work exposes the Sherpas to a huge amount of risk. Each time they pass through this river of ice they are terrified as this constantly shifting, creaking icefall is prone to collapse

and avalanche. It is the most dangerous part of the Everest South Side climb, and the place where most Sherpas lose their lives.

The expedition clients are exposed to disproportionately much less risk, crossing the Icefall only around 2 – 3 times. Some expedition companies consider it so dangerous, they send their clients to acclimatize on a nearby peak, to avoid the icefall during the acclimatization phase. With expeditions charging up to \$US 100,000 to summit Everest, these expeditions attract a wealthy, predominately Western clientele who see summiting Everest as an intrepid challenge. However, it would be fair to say that most clients would not witness or notice the enormous amount of labour that goes on behind the scenes (and especially at night) by the Sherpas, to make their dreams possible.

Sherpas themselves are conflicted when it comes to Everest, which they call Chomolungma, or the 'Mother Goddess of the Earth'. Being Buddhist, the mountain holds great religious significance, and in Sherpa culture it is not considered heroic to climb her; it is instead considered by some almost blasphemous. To step on her head is deemed by some to bring bad luck, for instance. Before climbing, the Sherpas perform Buddhist rituals asking for permission to climb Chomolungma, and families pray continuously for the safe return of the climbers.

The Everest industry has brought significant economic opportunities to the Sherpas, which they have welcomed. Many climbing Sherpas rely on the income from the season to feed families for the year, and see climbing as a necessary path towards greater economic independence. In the two-month climbing season, they can earn up to US\$5,000 - ten times the average annual income in Nepal. Yet this prosperity has come at a price.

The complex, co-dependent relationship between Sherpas and foreign climbers can be traced back to the time of Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary. Tenzing Norgay made 'Sherpa' a household name when he summited Everest with Hillary in 1953, an achievement made possible due to selfless teamwork between the British team and the Sherpas. Yet, their joint achievement was acknowledged very differently – best illustrated by the fact that Hillary was knighted and Tenzing Norgay was not. For years, Tenzing Norgay was the most celebrated, famous Asian in the world, yet there was a feeling that, in the West he was not treated with due respect.

In 2013, a violent brawl broke out on Everest between the Sherpas and foreigners. Tensions boiled over when an Italian mountaineer called the Sherpas "slaves" and "motherfuckers", and a Swiss climber disrespected the Sherpas' authority on the mountain. Rocks and punches were thrown and death threats made. The brawl made headlines internationally, and these incidents fuelled a growing discontent amongst the Sherpas that they were being treated like second-class citizens, despite their essential role on the mountain.

Better education for Sherpa children, the Internet age, and increasing awareness of their ability to stand up for their rights, have sparked a movement amongst some younger Sherpas for self-determination. Not content to remain as the 'smiling, shy' Sherpa, under the thumb of foreign paternalism; the status quo is shifting on Everest.

This all provided ample incentive for Jen's return to Everest, to document the Sherpas' story at this tipping point of change. Jen explains, "I wanted to tell the story of a people making a choice about their future, so it was important to go back to capture this new era of Everest."

## THE KEY PLAYERS

It was on that initial 2004 trip that Jen met renowned mountaineer, **Phurba Tashi Sherpa**, with whom she has worked on several expeditions, and forged a unique bond through climbing alongside him. “He is an extraordinary force – an incredibly smart, kind-hearted, generous spirit,” she enthuses. Phurba Tashi has summited Everest 21 times; a world record that he jointly holds with Apa Sherpa. He has also borne the brunt of the ‘summit or bust’ approach of some of his clients. In 2006, a client who refused to turn back on Phurba Tashi’s advice, lost all of his fingers and toes to frostbite, and then tried to sue the expedition for failing to adequately protect him.

Phurba Tashi works as the lead *sirdar* (Sherpa climbing team leader) for **Russell Brice’s** Himalayan Experience. Brice is nearing the end of his expedition days, feeling weary of the overcrowded, intensely commercial Everest industry that he himself has contributed to creating. In recent years, Brice has had to also balance the problematic desire of some of his clients to reach the summit at all costs, which at times runs counter to ensuring the safety of his Sherpa team. Participating in the SHERPA film was his “way to give back to and acknowledge the Sherpa people.”

With the blessing of both Phurba Tashi and Brice to make the film, and their participation secured, Jen sought out an experienced producer. **Bridget Ikin (AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE, LOOK BOTH WAYS)**, who is known for her passion for adventurous drama, and stories from the edge, said that she was “immediately hooked. It’s such a timely, engaging story – on so many levels – and one that I connected to very deeply. I hope the film will benefit the Sherpa community, at this moment of change.”

Jen had also approached UK producer **John Smithson** (127 HOURS, TOUCHING THE VOID, DEEP WATER), who was enthusiastic about her proposal. “There are lots of Everest films made every year, but Jen came to me with a story that no one else was telling. And only Jen, with her background in high-altitude filmmaking and her bond with the Sherpas, could tell this story”.

**Ed Douglas**, journalist, author and Tenzing Norgay’s biographer, was asked to be a consultant. “Ed knows more about the history of the Everest and the Sherpa people than anyone else. So it was a relief when he agreed to be a part of this project, as he so clearly articulates how much of that history resonates in the Sherpas’ story today” says Jen. Luckily, Ed was at Base Camp while we were there, and agreed to a substantial filmed interview, which we use in the film.

## ASSEMBLING THE CREW

When choosing her on-location crew, Jen says, “One of the criteria I had for choosing this team was that there couldn’t be any alpha males; there wasn’t room for that kind of ego on a project like this - and Sherpas tend to be intimidated by big personalities. Thankfully, despite some altitude related illness, the crew was completely rock solid and managed through some pretty difficult circumstances.”

In the original treatment of SHERPA, it was planned that two high-altitude cinematographers would climb above Base Camp, following the Sherpa team all the way to the summit and this would form the spine of the film. **Renan Ozturk**, the film’s high-altitude director and

cinematographer, was a name that kept coming up in the team's research. Jen explains, "He's spent a lot of time in Nepal and speaks Nepali, so right from the beginning he was completely connected to this story. His work is breathtakingly beautiful and he is an accomplished climber, so I felt pretty lucky that we convinced him to do this job!"

Jen had worked previously with cinematographer **Ken Sauls**, an experienced climber and veteran of Everest shoots. Ken's was one of the first names to spring to mind when considering high-altitude cinematographers. "He's an incredible climber, very talented shooter and is just someone that you really want by your side," says Jen.

Jen would travel between the camps, following the story.

Cinematographer **Hugh Miller**, and long-time collaborator of Jen's, was to capture the action at Base Camp, along with Nick Emond, the film's sound recordist.

Key to the crew were the Sherpa camera operators. There were always going to be some parts of the climb, such as the rope fixing, and establishment of camps, that our crew would not get access to early in the season. As such, Jen always saw the importance of training some highly skilled climbing Sherpas to capture moments that the crew would otherwise not be able to film. She also saw this as a creative decision, saying "if we are making a film from the Sherpas' point of view, it was crucial that we involved them in the filmmaking process – literally seeing things through their eyes." Jen and cinematographer Hugh Miller travelled to Nepal prior to the shoot and spent time training Nima and Nawang Sherpa, supplying them with cameras, which they then used to practise with in the weeks before the expedition.

Jen: "I always knew that the Sherpa cameramen would be an important part of the equation, but I was not expecting the quality of their work to be so high. I was blown away by how quickly they learnt, and how passionate they were about the opportunity. They were able to film crucial scenes of Base Camp being set up before we arrived, and most importantly, footage of their work on the mountain, including on the day of the avalanche.

Data wrangler David Spruengli, translator Nima Sherpa, completed the on-location team – a tiny team for a production of this size.

## **SETTING OFF FOR THE SHOOT**

Bridget Ikin: "With well over 700 kg of gear, our small team assembled in Kathmandu in late March 2014, flew to Lukla and started the magnificent trek to Base Camp. Not knowing what was ahead, but planning for all contingencies, our cameras spanned the full range - from an Alexa to mobile phones, and many in-between." After three days' walking, the team stopped for several days in the village of Khumjung, to film with Phurba Tashi and his family. It was a welcome acclimatisation stop, enabling all the team to attend to their health, and prepare the gear for the next part of the journey.

On the days that followed, the team stopped, as they needed to, capturing the beauty of the landscape and Phurba's progress. Less than a week later, along with the clients on the Himalayan Experience expedition, they were at Everest Base Camp, in readiness for the puja – the ceremony to mark the start of the climbing season, in which offerings are made to the mountain gods, for safe passage and protection.

## LIFE AT EVEREST BASE CAMP

Everest South Side Base Camp is 5,364m (17,598 ft) above sea level. There are no permanent structures; everything and everyone is housed in tents. Portable petrol generators provide electricity and tonnes of equipment and supplies are brought in via yaks. For many weeks prior to the climbers' arrival, the Sherpa team is busy doing the back-breaking work preparing the site, shifting rocks, levelling out platform sites, and erecting tents. Thanks to the cameras we had previously given to two young Sherpa climbers, we were able to film the Base Camp being set up.

The small crew was an advantage in the challenging conditions on Everest Base Camp, enabling the film's shooting style of working nimbly, shooting fast, and unobtrusively capturing intimate moments.

However, altitude sickness is a serious risk for everyone at altitude, and most of the SHERPA crew were at some point struck down with headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness and sleep disturbance. One was plagued with a serious chest infection.

In the rough conditions, and under the shadow of potential illness, the film crew were "incredibly adaptable and strong" says Jen. "Living and working at altitude is actually the art of suffering and you have to just try and tune it out because it isn't a very comfortable way of living or working. But there's a simplicity to life as everything is pared back. There's less phone and less internet connectivity. You're living in a tent and there's something that I quite like about that because it just strips everything back to basics. You're in the moment."

SHERPA was primarily shot on two RED Epics, which were stripped down to minimise weight. There were situations when the crew would pare down even further and pick up a 1DC, Sony FS700, GoPro, or even their phone to capture footage. Freely Systems had also lent the production the use of a MōVI, their new lightweight stabilisation rig that was used in conjunction with the RED Epic to create some of the dramatic sweeping shots seen in the film. Renan also took some of the film's most spectacular aerials from a helicopter. As Renan describes, "when you're strapped in a harness and hanging out the door with a camera, it certainly makes you feel alive".

Good data management is crucial in rough shooting conditions and with cameras being grabbed by various crew to capture on-the-fly moments. The SHERPA team had a dedicated tent for their data wrangling. With power supplied by solar by day, and generator where necessary. Jen says of data wrangler David Spruengli "He did not stop at night until every card was downloaded, every battery was charged and everything was packaged up. David always kept everything ordered and working and really was a lynchpin to making the whole thing continue smoothly."

Having Sherpa translator Nima Sherpa on the production team was critical for the many interviews with Sherpa people that they did. As Jen explains "we did think about doing some of these interviews in English but the difference between doing them in English and then in Sherpa was extraordinary. I quickly realised that it was worth the extra effort to do the interviews via our translator. Our characters were so much more comfortable, and less deferent when speaking in their own language. They completely came to life, so the performances were much stronger. Also, having our Sherpa camera operators Nima and



Narwang gave the production access to “things that we wouldn't have had access to - an intimate part of their world that they allowed us to see”.

## **THE AVALANCHE AND THE AFTERMATH**

In the early hours of the 18<sup>th</sup> April 2014, after about only a week at Base Camp, a thunderous, massive block of ice crashed down Everest into the Khumbu Icefall near Base Camp. Jen, who was awake in her tent when it fell, wrote at the time “Avalanches in the mountains around Base Camp are very common, but this one was loud and caused me to sit upright in my sleeping bag. It came from a direction that caused me dread. I knew that our Sherpa team had left for a trip through the icefall at 2am that morning. I looked out of my tent and could see the massive white cloud right in the wrong place. There was silence, and then the radio chatter started.

Quickly, we established that there had been an avalanche and people had died”. The avalanche was the worst ever in Everest climbing history. 16 people died, all Sherpas.

After a traumatic day of casualty and body recovery, days of grief quickly followed. Then, the tragedy lead the Sherpas to re-evaluate their role on Everest, and many were angry about the risks they undertake.

Our filming team literally ran for days, filming where and what they could – trying to make sense of the confused unfolding situation. All this at altitude, where the simplest task is utterly exhausting.

Renan Ozturk: “Base camp in the days after the accident was a huge task. It looks all warm and sunny up there but it's actually really hard. Even to run 20 feet across Base Camp to run after a shot and hold these heavy cameras is a huge task and you find yourself out of breath. All these simple tasks on a normal production become so much harder. Then day after day that compounds, because it takes a lot of energy to shoot, then to prepare for the next day - and you find yourself going downhill and downhill and downhill.”

When the Nepalese Government announced that only \$US 400 was to be given to the families of the dead Sherpas, grief turned to anger very quickly. Sherpas gathered to demand better working conditions, higher compensation, and ultimately, the cancellation of this year’s Everest climbing season out of respect for their dead colleagues, and in the hope of a better future.

The Nepalese Government were slow to react to the tragedy. To many of the Sherpas, the Government appeared to be more concerned about the protests hurting the lucrative Everest industry than the loss of life. They were angry about the Government taking a huge cut out of every client’s summit fee, but only minimally managing the industry. Responding to the Government’s low compensation payout, the international climbing community banded together to support the grieving Sherpas, raising substantial funds. Eventually, under pressure, the Government raised minimum insurance cover from \$US 10,000 to \$US 15,000 and increased the \$US 400 payout to \$US 5,000.

“There was a lot of anger and confusion,” Jen says, “There were moments where our crew felt nervous about filming around Base Camp, but I think the Sherpas really started to trust us when word spread that we were there to tell their story. It got to the point where Sherpas were clearing the way so I could get a better shot at some of the demonstrations and meetings. I think they realised that our presence could be a good thing”.

The protests were effective. Eventually, all the expedition companies succumbed to pressure and cancelled their summit bids. Russell Brice's Himalayan Experience was one of the last to cancel. Despite not losing any of his Sherpa team in the avalanche, Brice cited fears of repercussions by angry Sherpas if the expedition did go ahead. Brice's clients were left bitterly disappointed. Some of these 2014 clients were also clients on his cancelled 2012 season, so to have their expedition cancelled a second time was a devastating blow.

Jen speaks about filming during this turbulent week. "My instinct as a documentary filmmaker is just to follow the story. But you don't know what the story is anymore, so you have to actually just capture everything. The driving force was just to not miss anything and to try and capture emotions while they're fresh. What I've learnt about emotion and tragedy is that your perspective changes day by day and that change can show real character transformation. So, if you're not getting it fresh in the moment while it's happening, you've just got a bunch of talking heads later which is very different to the emotion in the moment".

After the avalanche and after all the clients had gone home, the SHERPA crew stayed behind to capture the Sherpas packing up Base Camp and returning to their families. The crew travelled back to the Khumjung village, to one of the communities rocked by the tragedy. As Jen describes, "It was very emotional but a very important part of the filming process. Again, you know, you're always not sure if you're crossing the line or not, you know, is it, is it an intrusion? Is it too soon? But ultimately I think, like anything in life, the hard things are often the things that end up being the most important and I think somehow allowing people to express those emotions can be cathartic and ultimately, I hope via this film, healing."

## **TELLING A NEW STORY**

Returning to Australia, Jen was faced with telling a completely new story. Exhausted after an intense shoot, a new strong outline had to be written immediately. Everything now revolved around the avalanche and its devastating impact and resonances. "The avalanche put a lot of the issues that our original film was hoping to address under a microscope. So it's not an Everest climbing film anymore, but in some ways it was never going to be that. It was always a film about Sherpas, rather than a film about climbing. But it was only when I returned home and contemplated the story that I recognised that despite the tragedy, the story was actually an inspirational one. We inadvertently witnessed and documented an historic event. The Sherpas united, and, at great financial sacrifice to themselves, stood up for what they believed was right and effectively cancelled the season. It became a story about the Sherpas re-claiming their mountain, *Chomolungma*.

The post-production team were also faced with a huge challenge in ingesting, managing and transcribing the sheer number of hours of rushes captured across many devices and formats, a process that took several weeks. Translating the rushes took months, with the majority of the interviews in Sherpa, Nepali, Tibetan, and some in a dialect of Rai.

The story threw up the disproportionate risk that the Sherpas are asked to bear, as they walk through the dangerous Khumbu Icefall up to 30 times a season. The clients, on the other hand, only walk through this most treacherous area two or three times. Jen: "We wanted this story to be very clear. And, in order to do that, we were intent on weaving through the film, the back-stories which have contributed to the growing sense of unease in

the relationship between Sherpas and the foreigners – which has its seeds in Tenzing’s story, the growing commercialization of climbing on Everest in the intervening years, and perhaps culminating in the brawl in 2013.”

Two experienced documentary editors, Lindi Harrison and Elliott Magen, worked as assembly editors to trawl through the footage and construct initial sequences. The baton was then passed to editor, **Christian Gazal** (HAPPY FEET, HAPPY FEET 2, THE LITTLE DEATH), who shaped the film’s dramatic structure. “Christian has great story sense, and right from the onset we were in sync about the film we were making,” says Jen. London-based editor Justine Wright (TOUCHING THE VOID) visited, as a consultant editor, and her insights were invaluable.

Acclaimed Australian composer **Antony Partos** (ANIMAL KINGDOM, THE ROVER) composed much of the music for the film, together with a number of licensed tracks (including some by Max Richter).

Jen has had a long-standing working relationship with veteran sound designer Sam Petty. When asked to do the project, Sam was so enthusiastic he ended up trekking with the SHERPA crew to Base Camp, gathering distinctive sounds that he has incorporated into his design.

## **THE FUTURE**

There is no doubt that the events of 2014 will have a longer-term impact on the Everest industry at large, including the Sherpas. “They certainly won’t be taken for granted in the same way again,” says Jen. “They proved in 2014 that commercial expeditions aren’t possible without them and already, there have been some changes for the positive. Compensation to the victim’s families and insurance levels were both significantly increased. But there is still a lot that needs to change in terms of safety and better regulation that needs to be brought to the industry.”

For some Sherpas, the tragedy has caused them to re-evaluate their role in the industry. For others, it remains a financial necessity and they will continue to roll the dice. We certainly hope that the film will shed some light on the true role of the Sherpas on Everest, a deeper insight into their lives and that this tragedy will result in some meaningful change for the Sherpas.”

### **In memory of the 16 Sherpas who died:**

Mingma Nuru, Dorje Sherpa, Ang Tshiri, Nima Sherpa, Phurba Ongyal, Lhakpa Tenjing Sherpa, Chhiring Ongchu Sherpa, Dorje Khatri, Dorje Sherpa, Phur Temba Sherpa, Pasang Karma Sherpa, Asman Tamang, Tenzing Chottar, Ankaji Sherpa, Pem Tenji Sherpa, Ash Bahadur Gurung

And to all the Sherpas who have died working on Mt Everest.