

## Tom Whittaker's Everest

On May 27, 1998, Tom Whittaker stood facing an icy wind as he looked out on the world from the highest point on the earth's surface, Mount Everest. The climb to the summit was the fulfillment of a long-held dream. Tom was not just another climber, however. In reaching the top, Whittaker became the first disabled person ever to reach the top of Everest.

In 1979, Whittaker was involved in a car accident. Another vehicle hit his car nearly head on. Injuries to his feet and knees required the removal of his left kneecap and the amputation of his right foot. But Tom had long been a fighter, and now he worked to rebuild his life. He also started to build a dream. That dream was to climb the highest mountain in the world.

Mount Everest, which means "Mother Goddess of the Earth," is located in the Himalayan range on the border between Nepal and Tibet in southern Asia. The mountain is 29,028 feet of treacherous, icy terrain. Sir Edmund Hillary of New Zealand and Tenzing Norgay of Nepal accomplished the first successful climb of Everest in 1953. Since that time, many have attempted to reach its summit but few have succeeded, and approximately 150 people have died in the attempt.

In 1993, Tom Whittaker set a record for the highest climb by an amputee when he reached Mount Everest's North Ridge, approximately 1,100 feet below the summit. In 1995, he got close again. A climbing partner who reached the top brought back a rock and encouraged a disappointed Whittaker by saying that he wanted Tom to put the rock back.

Finally, Whittaker's extraordinary efforts and determination paid off. On May 27, 1998, Tom Whittaker stood on the absolute top of the world. In reaching the

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summit of Everest, Tom achieved a major personal goal. He now has a new one. His new goal is to encourage us all to look at what we can accomplish rather than what we cannot.

- What are some intangibles that help people to surmount obstacles?
  
- To negotiate a mountain like Everest, an amputee must use 50 percent more energy than an able-bodied climber. How do you think Tom prepared for his climb?
  
- Imagine that you found yourself in Tom's predicament. What are some of the goals you would set for yourself?