

Filmmaker puts his faith in healing of the Himalayas

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Nov 06, 2011

StarAdvertiser.com

By Mike Gordon



Not long after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2008, after the radiation had left him weak and depressed, documentary filmmaker Tom Vendetti felt an inexplicable tug on his soul. He had to return to the Himalayas once more.

Vendetti, who lives on Maui, had been to the region more than a dozen times since 1983, including visits for three previous documentaries. But even though he took a camera — the Emmy Award winner has been a filmmaker for 25 years, and it's a habit — this trip was a pilgrimage.

His trek would take him to Everest Base Camp, which shelters mountain climbers at an altitude of 18,192 feet. He hadn't been there since his first trip.

"I found my body coming back to life," the 59-year-old Vendetti said. "And I made it all the way to base camp, and then some really magical things happened that are sort of unexplainable."

Part of that magic can be found in his new film, "When the Mountain Calls: Nepal, Tibet & Bhutan." Vendetti combined footage from earlier films with new material shot on his pilgrimage in order to reflect on nearly 30 years of traveling, the people he fell in love with on his journeys and the spiritual revelations he experienced.

"I think we all have something that reaches out to us, and in my case it is the Himalayan mountains," Vendetti said. "I found, especially when I was in the Himalayas, this whole concept of how nature affects us in a positive way really affected me. I just found myself feeling very calm inside and content."

When he returned to Maui and his full-time job as a psychologist at Maui Memorial Medical Center, Vendetti sought out his friend Robert C. Stone, who had worked with him on other documentaries. At the time, Vendetti was working on a short film on climate change.

"He said, 'My time might be limited here,' and he wanted to make a bigger film," Stone said. "This is taking a step back and looking at a 30-year period. It's Tom's complete journey."

The film includes footage of Grammy Award-winning musician Paul Horn performing in the centuries-old Potala Palace in Lhasa, which was once the home of the Dalai Lama.

Horn's flute session was originally shot in 1998 for Vendetti's film "Journey Inside Tibet." Although he had already played his flute inside the Taj Mahal and at the Great Pyramid of Giza, Horn, now 81, felt a special connection to the palace.

"When I was a kid I would dream of it," Horn said. "When I am there I feel at home, like I am coming back to some essential part of me."

It's easy to understand the region's pull on Vendetti, Horn said.

"It's old, and it has history and a mystery to it," the musician said. "And if it resonates within you, you can ponder that or you can go there."

Vendetti went. And with a nod toward both modern medicine and mountains, he's healthy.

"I'm happier, and Iâcertainly have more insight into what it means to be happy," he said. "My hope is that when people watch this they will be inspired and contemplate this concept of happiness."

"When the Mountain Calls" will screen at 1 and 4 p.m. Nov. 13 at the Doris Duke Theater at the Honolulu Academy of Arts. Tickets are \$25.

AND that's a wrap ...

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