



Filmmaker shares journey into Himalayas

Andrea Frainier - The Garden Island | Posted: Wednesday, November 9, 2011 11:45 pm

Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part story on "When the Mountain Calls." See Friday's Lifestyle section for the second part.

LIHU'E — His travels have brought him to the foot of Mount Everest and face-to-face with the Dalai Lama.

Emmy Award-winning Maui filmmaker Tom Vendetti will share his story about searching for the meaning of happiness Saturday at the Kaua'i premiere screening of "When the Mountain Calls: Nepal, Tibet & Bhutan."

Preceding the show, Grammy Award-winning musician Paul Horn will perform in concert as author Ann Mortifée reads passages from her best-selling book, "In Love With the Mystery."

The event begins at 7 p.m. at Kaua'i Community College's Performing Arts Center.

The composite documentary splices together footage from Vendetti's earlier pilgrimages to the Himalayas with new material he shot in 2008, after he was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

Tired and depressed from his cancer treatments, Vendetti felt the Himalayas beckoning him to recharge his spirit. As he explains in the film, "when the mountain calls ... show up."

With the intention of filming a documentary about climate change, Vendetti's vision of the film shifted into a feature about him and his 30-year search for the meaning of happiness.

"Being a psychologist, I've always been searching for the meaning of happiness and what happiness is all about," Vendetti said. "With Bhutan in particular, they are on to something in terms of Gross National Happiness and the model they are putting out to their own people."

For the Bhutanese, happiness is not laughing, but a feeling of contentment from within about yourself and life, Vendetti said.

"When I'm up in the mountains, I really get a sense of that. I think it's projected by the people and probably a Buddhist upbringing, along with its natural beauty and surroundings of the mountain. ... For other people, the mountain may be looking into their child's eyes or a family member, or something totally different."

Vendetti moved to Maui 18 years ago, where he has served as a psychologist at various health centers and hospitals.

The first film Vendetti produced was inspired by his work in the mental health field and resulted in the 1986 documentary titled "Therapy on the River," about a rafting expedition in southern Utah and the positive effects it had on his mentally ill patients.

"We shot it, and it made it on local television, and after I saw that I was just hooked," Vendetti said. "It is such a powerful media to get my word out in terms of — at the time — protecting culture and the environment and also promoting the rights of the mentally ill."

Vendetti began looking through the lens of a video camera at the sacred places and spiritual people he came across during his travels to the Everest region, resulting in the award-winning documentaries "Bhutan: Taking the Middle Path to Happiness," "Mount Kailash: Return to Tibet" and "Journey Inside Tibet" — all of which are featured in "When the Mountain Calls."

The feature length documentary also shares Vendetti's journal entries and the spiritual people he encountered, their beliefs and practices.

Stories include a serendipitous encounter with Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary — the first two people to reach the summit of Mount Everest — and interviews with the Dalai Lama and Yeshey Zimba, the former prime minister of Bhutan.

Stories of Lama Tenzin of the Maui Dharma Center return to Tibet after decades of exile and Vendetti's near arrest at the Portola Palace produce some of the film's greatest moments.

Tickets for "When the Mountain Calls" and "In Love with the Mystery" are \$20 per person and may be purchased in advance at

www.ticketderby.com or at the door. Seating is not reserved and will be on a first-come, first-served basis. No online ticket sales will be accepted after Friday.

Visit www.whenthemountaincalls.com for more information.

- Andrea Frainier, lifestyle writer, can be reached at 245-3681, ext. 257 or afrainier@thegardenisland.com.