

Attempting Everest the harder way – Nicholas Talbot

The speaker at the July meeting was Nicolas Talbot. Nicolas had been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis (CF) as a child, but this had not prevented him from undertaking some remarkable activities, including climbing the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. His presentation described how, despite several unsuccessful attempts, he had managed to climb to the top. Nicolas began by reminding the audience of the nature of CF, caused by a faulty gene and resulting in the eventual failure of some of the body's major organs. Despite much research and the development of new drugs, the average life expectancy of sufferers was still only 42 years. More money was needed for further research.

Nicolas had always been interested in outdoor activities and had tried to keep himself fit within the limits of his disability. Prior to his first attempt on Everest, he had done 6 months of serious physical training including some at high altitude. However, this attempt was unsuccessful caused partly by insufficient training. Four years later he returned. He successfully made it to camps one and two but had to turn back around camp three. He had become seriously ill and after collapsing into camp two, had eventually staggered back to base camp.

It was about this time that a new drug was developed which gave considerable relief to about 5% of CF sufferers and Nicolas was within that 5%.

Undaunted, he made a third attempt in 2014, having reduced his coughing, increased his lung capacity and improved his ability to retain body mass. He displayed a photo of 'Horace', a very heavy rubber tyre which he had towed around wherever he went as part of his training to help increase his strength. While at camp one there was a major ice fall which tragically killed several people in the camp. Nicolas was caught up in this and suffered several broken ribs as well as losing his tent and equipment. Somehow, he managed to borrow a down suit and he descended to a lower camp where a helicopter took him to Kathmandu. He found himself in the airport with no change of clothes, identification or money. What did he do? He called home of course. Displaying enormous determination, he decided to return for a fourth time. This was during a period when there had been some extremely bad weather and two climbing disasters. It did mean however that there were very few people on the last climb to the top. There was a slight improvement in the weather and after initially turning back, he made it to the top. We can imagine the relief and sense of achievement he felt.

This was a fascinating story of determination and a will to succeed from someone who had to deal with a serious medical condition. It was an inspiring and humbling experience to hear Nicolas' story which was also delivered with much humour.

The vote of thanks was given by Alan Swindale and was followed by a collection in aid of cystic fibrosis.

The next meeting will be held on the 22nd August when Matthew Read will be speaking on 'Meeting new challenges at the Bowes Centre'.

For further information about U3A contact Ian Reid tel: 01833 631304

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