

Hello. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Let's do it again. It is time to learn and improve your American English. Today we travel to New York to visit with some famous mountain climbers. They are still sad about losing some of their own recently in a faraway land.

Then we travel to the southwestern United States to learn about the work of a man who built some of the most famous buildings in America.

As It Is ...on the Internet, on television, and on radio ...is on the air.

Sherpas continue to mourn the 16 mountain guides who died in an avalanche on Mount Everest. The avalanche, or snow slide, overpowered and killed the guides on April 18th. At the time, the group was preparing a path so that Westerners could climb the world's highest mountain.

New York City is home to the largest Sherpa community outside Nepal. VOA's Adam Phillips is in New York. Christopher Cruise has his report.

The New York neighborhood of Elmhurst, Queens is home to an estimated 3,500 Sherpas. Many of them were busy at work last Saturday. They were preparing for a community-wide memorial service in the Buddhist center at the headquarters of the United Sherpa Association.

Ang Geljen Sherpa, a Nepalese-American, is head of the association.

“New York is a busy life. But yet we keep in touch with our community back home, and we are all connected through e-mails or through phones. So people knew these people. And you know, most of them were brought up there around the Everest region. So definitely the feeling was more sorrow.”

Ang Geljen Sherpa is pleased with his people's tradition of safely guiding climbers, usually from the West, up Mount Everest. Many climb to the nearly 9,000 meter high summit -- the highest point on the mountain's surface.

"And the climbers who go up the mountain they know that the risk factor is there. Every year people get killed on the mountain. But still they are willing to take this risk because they have to put food on the table. Of course, the safety concern is like, it's very important. But you know, you can't do nothing about the avalanches."

However, one can do safer work, even it is far less profitable than guiding groups up the mountain and carrying their equipment. That is what Pasang Kanchee Sherpa told her brother before he died in the accident. Many years earlier, her other brother was also killed there.

Ngawang Dhondup is a Buddhist religious worker or monk. He saw Pasang Kanchee Sherpa crying all during the eight-hour traditional funeral ceremony for her brother. The monk had both an emotional reaction and a spiritual explanation.

“It’s really sad it happened there. But people have to die because of their karma. According to Buddhism, when people die they are born again...in a good place. So we just have to pray for them.”

Karma is said to be the force created by a person’s actions. Some people believe it causes good or bad things to happen to that person.

United Sherpa Association President Ang Geljen Sherpa says it was not only karma that brought death to those Sherpas on Mount Everest. It was economic reasons and few other choices.

“That’s why, you know, we are in America, you know. We have to tell our kids we have to focus on education. So we have to break this cycle of, like, climbing.”

He hopes Sherpas will learn to strike a balance between the traditions of the past and present day safety concerns on the world's tallest mountain. I'm Christopher Cruise.

If You Build It, They Will Come!

Frank Lloyd Wright has been called the father of modern American architecture. Wright designed hundreds of buildings and other structures during his lifetime. He died in 1959.

The grand expanse of his designs can be seen at two historic properties in the western state of Arizona. One is Taliesin West. It served as Wright's winter home and architecture school. And just a short drive from the property is a Wright-influenced hotel. Caty Weaver serves as our guide.

The sound of water hitting the ground is unusual in the dry sagebrush foothills that surround Taliesin West. But the water comes from a fountain operating on the grounds.

Frank Lloyd Wright began work on this 200 hectare property in 1939. The buildings include an airy theater for live performances, an underground “kiva” for watching movies, and the place where Wright lived until his death.

Guide Mark Coryell leads visitors toward the office where Wright met with people from around the world.

“This way. We’re going to head on in.”

Tall visitors must bend down so they do not hit their heads against Wright’s low doorways. They can stand up again in his office. The room is built of native stone. It also has high ceilings that seem to float because they are clear enough to let light pass through.

Mark Coryell says Wright was able to create this effect by using simple canvas cloth.

“Mr. Wright always kind of felt that they were camping out here in the desert.”

This “camp” includes windows placed so high that only the desert sky can be seen. One visitor notes the sharp difference between the blue sky and the floors, which Wright painted a bright Chinese red.

“And the colors and just everything is so nice out here.”

During the 1930s, most American architects liked to design buildings with traditional white columns. These tall supports were often added to straight, traditional-looking buildings, surrounded by orderly green lawns. The columns at Taliesin West are not straight. They slant, creating surprising images as the sun travels across the sky. The stone walls mix well with the native plants and desert trees. Visitors say they really like Wright’s ideas.

“He’s uniquely American, and he wanted to break from us just copying other cultures like we did in Washington. Beautiful, obviously, but it’s not unique. So that’s really one of the legacies.”

“I have a niece and a nephew that are both young architects. And they’re all drawn to those that came before. It’s the continuity of history. And I love it.”

To keep that continuity, the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation spends over one million dollars a year on Taliesin West. The group also directs the architecture school on the property.

Only 30 minutes from Taliesin West is another building Frank Lloyd Wright would like. The Arizona Biltmore Hotel rises like the official home of a great leader.

It was designed by one of Wright’s students. But the famous architect offered suggestions for creating the hotel’s beautiful walls.

They are made from concrete “Biltmore Blocks,” that include palm frond designs. Details like these have persuaded presidents, movie stars and others to visit the Biltmore, even today. I’m Caty Weaver.

And I’m Jim Tedder in Washington. From the dangers of climbing the world’s highest mountain, to learning about America’s most famous builder ...you never know what to expect when you listen to As It Is on VOA.

