

Robson Entertainment presents

BLINDSIGHT

Directed by Lucy Walker
Produced by Sybil Robson-Orr

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Robson Entertainment presents "Blindsight"
Featuring Sabriye Tenberken & Erik Weißenmayer
Edited by Sebastian Duthy Original Music By Nitin Sawhney
Director of Photography Petr Cikhart Executive Producer Steven Haft
Produced by Sybil Robson Orr Directed By Lucy Walker

104 minutes 35mm Dolby 5.1

www.blindsightthemovie.com

BLINDSIGHT

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

***“Just because you lose your sight,
doesn’t mean you lose your vision.”***

- Blind climber Erik Weihenmayer

SYNOPSIS

Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Himalayas, BLINDSIGHT follows the gripping adventure of six Tibetan teenagers who set out to climb the 23,000-foot Lhakpa Ri on the north side of Mount Everest. The dangerous journey soon becomes a seemingly impossible challenge -- made all the more remarkable by the fact that the teenagers are blind.

Believed by many Tibetans to be possessed by demons, the children are shunned by their parents, scorned by their villages and rejected by society. Rescued by Sabriye Tenberken, a blind educator and adventurer who established the first and only school for the blind in Tibet, the students invite the famous blind mountain climber Erik Weihenmayer to visit their school after learning about his conquest of Everest. Erik arrives in Lhasa and inspires Sabriye and her students Kyila, Sonam Bhumtso, Tashi, Gyenshen, Dachung and Tenzin to let him lead them higher than they have ever been before. The resulting 3-week journey is beyond anything any of them could have predicted.

THE MAKING OF BLINDSIGHT

The idea for the expedition came about after blind educator Sabriye Tenberken, who founded the school Braille Without Borders for the blind in Lhasa, wrote the following email letter to the world renowned blind mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer, upon hearing the news that he had summited Mt. Everest in 2001. Sabriye had read Erik’s book TOUCH THE TOP OF THE WORLD to the students in the school, and was inspired to get in touch following the incredible news of his summit.

The following is the letter that sparked the whole expedition and then film.

EMAILED FROM LHASA, TIBET, 2001:

Dear Erik,

After you reached the top of the world our Tibetan neighbour rushed into our centre and told the kids about your success. Some of them didn't believe it at first but then there was a mutual understanding; if you could climb to the top of the world, we also can overcome our borders and show to the world that the blind can equally participate in society and are able to accomplish great things.

Since my boyfriend Paul and I had read your book with great pleasure, I decided to tell the children about your life. Just one week ago I told the children in our centre all about your childhood, how you became blind, how you dropped your canes from bridges, how you finally met other blind people and then how you became confident in wrestling. All of them were very impressed by all these experiences you had and they compared your experiences with their own ones. Again they realized that it does not matter much if you are a blind child in Germany, USA or Tibet, the experience one has who becomes blind, the embarrassment at first, the confidence which builds up slowly but steadily, the reaction of the sighted is probably for every blind person the same.

After I had told your story to the children, the boys were walking together with some of our sighted colleagues through the inner part of Lhasa. Lhasa is not the blind-friendliest city in the world. There are lots of holes in the street, which sometimes are a few meters deep. Construction sites are never protected through wires. It can happen that you step in huge puddles of dirty water or even excrements. Most of our children know their way through this chaos. I teach them mobility and they are quite confident in using their canes. They always think that if I could find my way around they also have to try. The only problem is that they are sometimes very embarrassed to show their canes since nomads and pilgrims who never saw a cane before often make fun about them. They call them "blind fools", imitate them and laugh about them. One of the boys however once turned around and said: "you can not talk to me like that, I am blind but I am not a fool! And did you ever go to school, do you know how to read and write? Can you find the toilet in the middle of the night without a torch?"

Not all of these children have this pride and confidence to react in such a strong way. I often tell them, that they should understand that these people are just stupid. And if they can, they should say something back. Most of them now like the idea to defend themselves in a verbal way. First, they try to reply in a rather friendly way and if this does not help, they are starting to shout back, make fun of them and soon they have the crowd on their side.

And still, if a sighted friend is around, they try to hide away their canes to walk invisible and convenient on the arm of the sighted.

And at this day when I ended your story by saying, 'this man, who is blind like you climbed the top of the world, not by holding the arm of a sighted friend, but with the help

of some strings and two canes,' they all proudly decided to walk on their own without the convenience of walking with the sighted. Stories like yours changed their lives. Most of them now understand that there is nothing to be embarrassed about. They can be very proud little people, and they say quite often: "we are blind, so what? We can speak English and Chinese, we can find our way in the labyrinth of Lhasa's walkways, we are able to read and write in three different Braille scripts and we read and write without using light."

Last week I told them already that I wanted to write to you to ask if you would like to come to Tibet, maybe even to do a small climbing workshop with our kids.

Two years ago, some of our students started with rock climbing, taught by Tibetan Everest guides from the Tibetan mountain climbing institute. After you have reached the Everest I talked to this climbing teacher about the idea of inviting you to Lhasa. He became very interested and since then we were searching for your e-mail address.

In a way, we are something like colleagues, maybe in encouraging the blind to stand up, to find and to overcome their own borders.

As I read from your book we have the same philosophy, similar history and a similar way of approaching ideas.

We all would be very excited if you could visit our project. Paul and I also want to come to the States in the beginning of the next year and maybe we have the chance to meet you somewhere there first.

Right now I am sitting in our computer room. Next to me is Gyenshen, a brilliant young student who became blind with the age of 9. He together with two other girls get computer lessons and he also is writing a letter to you.

Gyenshen comes from a very remote and poor farmer area. After he became blind his family kept him away in a dark room for three years. The family was embarrassed having a blind child. In Tibet, people believe that blindness is a punishment for something which the person has done bad or wrong, in his/her previous life. People also believe that blind people are possessed by demons.

When he came to our project he was very shy. Now he is one of the best students and is quite confident with handling the computer. He is probably the only one of his village who knows that the world is round, and that one can communicate through just a wire. He is able to tell the other children of the village that "iron yaks" are Toyota Landcruisers which drink gasoline instead of water.

The blind that grow up in Tibet have certainly a totally different life than we in Germany or you in the US. But they feel a close solidarity with blind people from other countries.

This connection and solidarity gives them a lot of strength and power to manage their lives.

Today is the international day of the white cane and you help us to fill this day with pride.

Greetings from a sunny and cold Lhasa, greetings from all the children, the staff and especially from Paul.

Say hello to your family.

With lots of good wishes, yours truly,

Sabriye Tenberken

ON THE GENESIS OF THE FILM:

The idea for the film came from Erik Weißenmayer the blind mountaineer and one of the main characters in the film. Erik was put in contact with film producer Sybil Robson Orr by producer Steven Haft. He thought this story would likely resonate with her because of her interest in Tibet and mountain climbing. (She met her husband Matthew climbing Kilimanjaro, the same mountain on which Erik got married.) It only took one meeting with Erik before she decided to make the film.

“Erik told me climbing mountains gave him confidence as a blind teenager and he wanted to share that experience with these blind Tibetan kids. He asked me if I thought taking 6 blind Tibetan teenagers up a 23,000-foot mountain in the Himalayas sounded like a movie. I told him it did and decided to make it,” says producer Robson-Orr. Sybil and Steven Haft had liked Lucy Walker’s ‘Devil’s Playground,’ the critically acclaimed documentary feature about Amish teenagers, and asked her if she’d be interested in directing this project. Lucy connected with the material personally, and thus the filmmaking unit was complete.

ON BLINDNESS:

“Blind people in Tibet are really lacking in resources, support, understanding, medical care, and expectations, and even at the blind school it was hard to believe that Erik could have done something so immensely challenging” says Lucy Walker, director. “Sabriye herself knew that blind people can do anything they put their minds to, and Erik provided the perfect example for her to instill this in her students - once she had convinced them that it was true. Then they were so overjoyed that Sabriye wrote to Erik to tell him about it. When Erik received the letter he said he “felt like a coward” in comparison to what Sabriye had achieved, and resolved to visit - and then the idea for a climbing expedition was born, as we see in the film”.

ON INTERPRETING BLINDNESS CINEMATICALLY:

“I was always anxious not to use the cliché of a soft-focus lens to depict the vision of the blind people in the film who have some vision - because that is not what their vision looks like,” says director Lucy Walker. “They have all kinds of variations on image distortion, with dancing eyes, or being able to sense light only, all very specific, and I felt we should either go for it or not, but I didn’t want to use an inaccurate analogy like out-of-focus”.

ON THE PRODUCTION SCHEDULE AND LOCATIONS:

The production was divided into 2 shoots; the spring training in May 2004 involved a climb up a vertical rock face and a trek over a 16,000-foot pass beginning at Tsurpu Monastery. The second shoot from September to November 2004 involved traveling across the Tibetan plateau to all of the 6 kids’ villages, including a trip 1000 km away to southern China, by plane, and an additional 3 days by van to find Tashi’s family in Szechuan Province. The expedition up the 23,000-foot Lhakpa Ri was also shot in the fall.

ON THE CHALLENGES OF SHOOTING IN TIBET:

Producer Robson-Orr notes, “Shooting in Tibet presents a myriad of challenges. The most significant being that the Chinese authorities are extremely particular about what you shoot. If it is not listed on your shot list, approved in Beijing prior to your arrival, they won’t let you shoot it. You are assigned minders to make sure you don’t. At the same time, if you are shooting what you said you intended to, there is no problem. Fortunately, we only had the best of intentions and only a few hiccups.”

“When we were shooting in southern China, Szechuan police arrived and demanded we stop shooting at the very moment Tashi was being reunited with his father for the first time in 9 years. Tashi’s reunion was a major moment in our film, unfolding before our eyes, and it could never be recaptured. Fortunately, Petr Cikhart is very experienced in tense shooting conditions and was not fazed by the pressure. Ultimately, we did get shut down but not before we shot the first 10 golden minutes of the reunion. The police put us under a ‘house arrest’ of sorts back in our hotel in Luding. They seemed to be concerned we were shooting something political. Turns out the film permit we purchased from Beijing only applied to locations listed for Tibet, but not the ones in China. Fortunately, a senior official from the Tibet Autonomous Region called officials in Luding and told them everything was okay and they let us continue shooting the next day.”

ON CAMERAS AND FOOTAGE:

Producer Robson-Orr says one of the most difficult hurdles of this shoot was getting approval from the Chinese government to bring into Tibet what they refer to as ‘big cameras.’ In the case of BLINDSIGHT, that meant the difference between the

Panasonic AG-DVX 100, which is mini-DV, versus the Panasonic AJ-HD27 Vericam, which is high definition. There was such a short amount of time to prepare for the May training climb, given the restrictions, we were only allowed to bring in what are considered by the Chinese authorities to be 'tourist' cameras. "We determined the best mini-DV video camera with a 'film' effect available was the DVX 100. We shot in 'progressive' mode with great success. When we returned in the fall, we were equipped with permits for 2 Panasonic high definition cameras, both HD27 Vericam's and the footage was spectacular, very filmy, really beautiful. We experimented with 'video' and 'film' mode on those cameras discovering 'film' mode was far superior for not blowing out in tricky light situations and creating beautiful blacks.

After checking the color on the 35mm film out, the timer at St. Anne's Post in London insisted that a UK Panasonic representative come by to look at BLINDSIGHT that quite seamlessly cuts between DVX100 and the HD27. He thought the film was a better example of the performance of those two cameras side by side than their own Panasonic show reel.

In total, the filmmakers shot about 250 hours worth of footage and obtained another 20 hours worth of archival footage. In short, they condensed around 270 hours worth of footage into 104 minutes.

ON SHOOTING AT ALTITUDE:

The biggest challenge at altitude is making sure the crew gets enough rest, proper food and most importantly, doesn't get sick. In order to shoot the climbing team passing by, the crew had to run ahead of the climbers, set up, let them pass and then run up in front of them again, all the time carrying over 40 pounds of gear and all at altitudes ranging between 15,000 and 22,000 feet.

Concentration is hugely important and is one of the first things to slip when at altitude. Nightly production meetings were held to insure the team was getting the coverage necessary, recognizing there would never be a way to shoot everything, but always checking to make sure what they did have was quality.

ON FILM CREW HEALTH ISSUES:

The film crew did suffer various bouts of illness in the course of the shoot including food poisoning, altitude sickness, flu, amoebic dysentery and giardia. Sybil Robson-Orr recalls that the director of photography Petr Cikhart was shooting an interview with Kyila "when he politely excused himself from the building, went outside, threw up, came back to his camera and resumed shooting and never mentioned he had been sick."

ON THE IMPACT THE FILMMAKERS HOPE THE FILM WILL HAVE :

Lucy Walker, Director:

“ I hope that this film will be important and enjoyable for blind audiences. I hope that as many blind people as possible will be able to experience the film, and I am delighted that we have a state-of-the-art audio description track for blind audiences, and I hope that this may also encourage more cinemas to install the system.

I feel very privileged to have been able to have spent three months traveling in Tibet, and to have had this chance to get to know some of this unique place and its inspiring inhabitants and beautiful culture, and I am honoured to share that with audiences. In particular, the visits to the six students’ homes and villages are pretty unique, as far as I know, in terms of the access we gained to ordinary Tibetan homes and villages -- and attitudes. My goal is that people come out of the movie theatre and stay up talking all night about the rights and wrongs, and the pros and cons, and the East and West, and the blind and sighted, and the Tibet and China, and the Sabriye and Erik, and the falling on your face versus falling on your ass of it all...”

Sybil Robson-Orr, Producer:

“My hope is that Sabriye, Erik and the kids inspire our audience to push through their personal boundaries and reach for their dreams. Through them, we can see that anything in life, whether we are physically challenged or not, is possible if we build the right team around us. They don’t want to be seen as blind people who do great things, but rather ambassadors for everyone who believes in climbing higher.”

Steven Haft, Executive Producer:

” In a number of the films I’ve done, it really comes back to what touched me about the story from the start, this film for me asks the question, ‘what does it take for you to get off the sideline in life and engage yourself?’ I believe this is what Sabriye and Erik did, like when Sabriye started the school and Erik was so intrigued by the letter he had from the kids that he went to meet them to try and work with them. Every audience can relate to this film, in that they can question their own lives, and ask ‘what am I doing to step off the sideline?’ “

BACKGROUND ABOUT THE TITLE “BLINDSIGHT”

The title of the film came about because it was agreed that it was vital not to shy away from the word ‘blind,’ and also that the title needed a unique and unusual feel, to truly reflect the film. Says Sybil Robson-Orr, producer “The word was initially inspired by how blind people are literally blindsided by society in Tibet. Blindsided became ‘blindsighted,’ abbreviated to BLINDSIGHT which we thought was a new word. After conducting an initial title search, we discovered that *blindsight* is an actual medical phenomenon involving a cortex of the brain in which blind people have a sense of perceived vision.”

‘Blindsight’ definition :

Visual processing in the brain goes through a series of processing stages. Destruction of the first visual cortical area, primary visual cortex (or V1 or striate cortex)

leads to blindness in the part of the visual field that corresponds to the damaged cortical representation. The area of blindness - known as a scotoma - is in the visual field opposite the damaged hemisphere and can vary from a small area up to the entire hemifield.

Although individuals with damage to V1 are not consciously aware of stimuli presented in their blind field, Larry Weiskrantz and colleagues showed in the early 1970s that if forced to guess about whether a stimulus is present in their blind field, some observers do better than chance. This ability to detect stimuli that the observer is not conscious of can extend to discrimination of the type of stimulus (for example, whether an 'X' or 'O' has been presented in the blind field). This general phenomenon has been dubbed "blindsight."

It is unsurprising from a neurological viewpoint that damage to V1 leads to reports of blindness. Visual processing occurs in the brain in a hierarchical series of stages (with much crosstalk and feedback between areas). As V1 is the first cortical area in this hierarchy any damage to V1 severely limits visual information passing from retina, via the LGN and then V1, to higher cortical areas. However, the route from retina through V1 is not the only visual pathway into cortex (though it is by far the largest); it is commonly thought that the residual performance of people exhibiting blindsight is due to preserved pathways into extrastriate cortex that bypass V1. What is surprising is that activity in these extrastriate areas is apparently insufficient to support visual awareness in the absence of V1.

References

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lhakpa Ri, the goal of the expedition, is 23,000 feet high, the name Lhakpa Ri means "Stormy Mountain."

Lhakpa Ri was first climbed in 1921 by George Mallory. Lhakpa Ri is higher than any peak outside of the Himalayas.

Everest in Tibetan is "Chomalungma," which means "Mother Goddess of the Universe." The North face (Route: Northeast Ridge) of Everest is in Tibet, and it was first climbed in 1960 by Shih Chan-chun and his team of 214 Chinese and Tibetan men and women. The South side (Route: Southeast Ridge) is in Nepal and was first climbed by Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay in 1953.

20% of people who have ever attempted to summit Mt. Everest have died in the process.

Blind climber's altitude record: Erik Weißenmayer, Mt. Everest, 29,035 ft.

Percentage of oxygen at altitudes compared to sea level:

Oxygen at sea level = approximately 23% of air.

Oxygen in Lhasa (altitude 3,650m /12,000 ft) = 11.5% of air.

Oxygen at the summit of Mt. Everest (altitude 8,850m/29,035 ft) = 7.7% of air.

The highest peaks on each continent are:

1. 29,035-foot Mount Everest (Asia)
2. 22,840-foot Mount Aconcagua (South America)
3. 20,320-foot Mount McKinley (North America)
4. 19,339-foot Mount Kilimanjaro (Africa)
5. 18,481-foot Mount Elbrus (Europe)
6. 16,067-foot Vinson Massif (Antarctica)
7. 7,316-foot Mount Kosciuszko (Australia)

Altitude sickness

Altitude sickness, also known as acute mountain sickness (AMS), is a deadly condition that is caused by acute exposure to high altitudes. It commonly occurs above 2,500m (8,000 ft). Headache is a primary symptom used to diagnose altitude sickness. A headache occurring at an altitude above 8000 ft combined with any of the following symptoms indicates probable altitude sickness:

- Loss of appetite, nausea, or vomiting
- Fatigue or weakness
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Insomnia

The most serious symptoms of altitude sickness are due to edema (fluid accumulation in the tissues of the body). At a very high altitude humans can get either high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE), or high altitude cerebral edema (HACE). These syndromes are potentially fatal.

Altitude acclimatization is the process of adjusting to decreasing oxygen levels at higher elevations, in order to avoid altitude sickness. Once above approximately 10,000 ft, most climbers and high altitude trekkers follow the “golden rule” – climb high, sleep low. For high altitude climbers, a typical acclimatization regime might be to stay a few days at a base camp, climb up to a higher camp (slowly), then return to base camp. A subsequent climb to the higher camp would then include an overnight stay. This process is then repeated a few times, each time extending the time spent at higher

altitudes to let the body "get used" to the oxygen level there, a process that involves the production of additional red blood cells.

The weather

Temperature in Tibet varies with the seasons. May to mid-October is pleasant along much of the trekking routes. However, going over 5000+ meters (6,500 ft) can be very cold with high winds. On Lhakpa Ri from May to September, one can expect maximum temperatures between 15-25°C (59 to 77°F) at 3500- 4000 meters (11,483–13,123ft) and 5-10°C (41 to 50°F) minimum. Once above 5500 meters ((18,044 ft), the temperature drops to between -10 and - 15 °C (14 to 5°F) and at 6500 meters (21,325 ft) it can be anywhere between – 20 and -25 °C (-4 to -13°F). It is always difficult to predict or assume weather conditions at higher altitudes because when the day gets gloomy, the temperature plummets almost too fast to record.

THE FILMMAKERS

LUCY WALKER - DIRECTOR

Lucy Walker was recently named one of Filmmaker magazine's "Top 25 New Faces In Film." She is best known for directing DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND (HBO/ Channel 4/Wellspring), a feature documentary about the struggles of Amish teenagers during their "rumspringa" period of freedom. It premiered to tremendous acclaim at Sundance and went on to win numerous accolades, including the Audience Award at Sarasota, Jury Prize at Karlovy-Vary, Best Documentary and Grand Prize at the AFI DV Fest, nominations for three Emmy awards (Best Documentary, Best Directing, and Best Editing), and a nomination for the Independent Spirit Award for Best Documentary. Lucy appeared as a guest on The Oprah Winfrey Show and the film is now a best-selling DVD.

Lucy grew up in London, England, she studied literature at Oxford University and directed theater before winning a Fulbright Scholarship to attend NYU's Graduate Film Program at Tisch School of the Arts, where she won various awards and received an MFA.

Lucy's other directing credits include music videos, award-winning short films (ONE TWO THREE, funded by Warner Brothers, was cited as "Best of the Festival" at Edinburgh), and Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*, for which she was nominated for two Emmys for Outstanding Directing.

She is currently writing and directing a fiction feature with Telefilm Canada, BBC Films, and Hart Sharp Entertainment.

SYBIL ROBSON-ORR - PRODUCER

After beginning her career in the news business as a reporter and television anchor at network affiliates in the US and ABC News in Paris, Sybil Robson-Orr launched a nationally syndicated consumer program for Paramount Pictures. Following a producer's deal at Universal Studios with partner Harvey Bernhard and a stint in sub-Saharan Africa shooting documentaries on the wars for independence, she established her own multi-media entertainment company, Robson Entertainment. She develops, produces and finances motion pictures, television programs and documentaries from offices in Los Angeles and London. Currently on her slate is a feature film based on Sabriye Tenberken's autobiography "My Path Leads To Tibet." Robson is also involved in launching funds in the USA, UK and South Africa spanning film, bridge and television financing.

STEVEN HAFT - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

In nearly twenty years of film and television production, New York-based Haft Entertainment has developed and produced more than thirty films. In that time, Steven Haft's films have generated seven Academy Award® nominations, including receiving Oscars® for Best Screenplay and Musical Score. They have also generated eight Emmy nominations, including Best Movie for Television. He is a past winner of the British Academy Award (BAFTA), the Italian Donatello and The Peabody, and nominee for the Golden Globe and French Cesar. His films have helped launch the careers of major young stars including Gwyneth Paltrow, Ethan Hawke, Colin Farrell and Robert Sean Leonard.

Haft has developed and produced such films as the acclaimed DEAD POETS SOCIETY, directed by Peter Weir; Jane Austen's EMMA, directed by Doug McGrath; TIGERLAND, directed by Joel Schumacher; THE THIRD MIRACLE, directed by Agnieszka Holland; THE LAST DANCE, directed by Bruce Beresford; THE SINGING DETECTIVE, directed by Keith Gordon, and EULOGY, directed by Michael Clancy. In addition, Haft produced such studio-developed films as HOCUS POCUS, starring Bette Midler, and JAKOB THE LIAR, starring Robin Williams.

Haft began his career in motion pictures producing documentaries for Public Broadcasting. His first documentary for WNET was the Oscar-nominated TRAVELLING HOPEFULLY.

PETR CIKHART - DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

When covering the war in Chechnya for Czech TV at the age of 19, Petr Cikhart was arrested and held hostage for two days by Russian soldiers. It was his first field shoot, and he was hooked. For the last eight years he has worked as a high adventure photographer on various projects including the first two seasons of National Geographic's critically acclaimed series *Be the Creature*; *Crisis Zone: Doctors Without Borders*; Award-winning television series such as *The Amazing Race*, and feature-length documentaries FARMINGVILLE and GANGS: ESCAPING THE LIFE.

KEITH PARTRIDGE - MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHY

Keith Partridge shot the spectacular and dramatic climbing footage for the BAFTA award winning film "Touching the Void" and has been involved in over 50 other climbing and adventure films. In 2004 he received the prestigious 'Camera Extreme Award' at the International Explorer's Festival.

SEBASTIAN DUTHY - EDITOR

Sebastian Duthy has more than fifteen years experience editing in London's film industry. Beginning his career in commercials, he moved on to edit music videos for the likes of Missy Elliot and M.O.P. For the last six years he has cut documentaries and drama, working on films such as the BAFTA nominated Dad's Dead. He is currently working as a writer/director for film and TV.

NITIN SAWHNEY - COMPOSER

Firmly established as a world-class songwriter, DJ, and composer, Nitin Sawhney is widely regarded as one of the most versatile musicians in the world. He has released 7 award-winning albums and has written or produced for Sir Paul McCartney, Sting, Will Young, and Sinéad O'Connor. He has scored over 30 films, including Mira Nair's upcoming THE NAMESAKE, and composed for the London Symphony Orchestra, The Philharmonic, and the Metropole Orchestra.

THE CLIMBING TEAM

SABRIYE TENBERKEN

"A lot of people say I can't do it because I'm blind, or I have red hair, or my feet are too big. Get the right team around you, don't set boundaries and go for it."

- Sabriye Tenberken

Blind since the age of 12, Sabriye was raised with the belief that blindness was more a personality trait than a disability. The result is a woman who has transformed attitudes about the blind in some of the most far-reaching places on the planet.

Sabriye decided to study Tibetology at Bonn University after a curator allowed her to touch Tibetan artifacts in a travelling exhibition. After enrolling, she soon discovered

there was no Braille text for the Tibetan language, so she created one herself in order to continue her studies.

Determined to share the Braille text with the people of Tibet, she was initially met with hesitation from the Chinese authorities because of her blindness and the difficulties they thought she would experience in Tibet. Most Tibetans believe that blind people are possessed by demons or have done something horribly wrong in their past life.

Sabriye persevered, travelling to Lhasa in 1997. She found a local Tibetan woman to accompany her on horseback through the frozen Himalayas to find blind kids to attend a school she was setting up for them. She found children who had been shunned by their parents, spurned by their villages, hidden away and tied to beds in dark rooms for years, some of them had never been taught to walk.

During these travels, Sabriye met Paul Kronenberg, her partner both personally and professionally, with whom she established the first school for the blind in Tibet and their organization Braille Without Borders.

Their groundbreaking work has been recognized internationally as a model for schools for the visually impaired in developing countries. The children are taught how to read, write and speak in three languages; Tibetan, Chinese and English and are given the tools needed for blind people to live independently in a sighted world. After 9 years, the first of her students are graduating, establishing businesses and becoming the principal breadwinners for their families.

Governments around the world have invited them to establish their trademark program in their own countries. They are establishing a new project in Kerala, India where they are training both sighted and blind people to fulfil that need.

Sabriye's work has won worldwide recognition including **Time Magazine's 2004 "Hero of the Year Awards"** in both Europe and Asia. In 2005, she was nominated for the **Nobel Peace Prize**, named **Young Global Leader** at the World Economic Forum, cited as Oprah's personal choice on her show "**Eight Women Oprah Wants You To Know**," and in August of 2006 was awarded two **Mother Teresa Awards**, one for herself, the other for Braille Without Borders. This is the only time the same person has been recognized twice in the same year.

ERIK WEIHENMAYER

"I wasn't afraid to go blind and see darkness. I was afraid to be swept to the sidelines and be forgotten, to be obsolete."

- Blind climber Erik Weihenmayer

On May 25, 2001, Erik Weihenmayer became the first blind man in history to reach the summit of Mount Everest, the world's highest peak. And on September 5, 2002, when

he stood on top of Mt. Kosciusko in Australia, Weihenmayer completed his 7-year quest to climb the Seven Summits - the highest mountains on each of the seven continents, joining only 150 mountaineers ever to do so, all of them sighted.

Shortly after losing his sight at the age of twelve, Erik lost his mother in a tragic car accident. In an effort to strengthen the family during this difficult time, Erik's father, an ex-Marine, took his three teenage sons on climbing trips to the far reaches of the globe including South America, India and Nepal. While awkward at first, Erik persevered and has emerged today as one of the most exciting and respected athletes in the world. In addition to climbing, Erik is also an acrobatic skydiver, long distance cyclist, snow skier, para-glider and marathon runner.

Erik's extraordinary accomplishments have gained him abundant press coverage including repeated visits to **The Today Show** and **NBC Nightly News**, **The Oprah Winfrey Show**, **Good Morning America**, and **The Tonight Show**. He has also been featured on the cover of **Time** magazine and in **Sports Illustrated**, **People**, and **Men's Journal**.

Erik has won a wide variety of prestigious awards and has been responsible for raising millions of dollars for blind organizations and other worthy causes in the United States and around the world. In a recent poll, Erik was named as one of the 20 most inspirational people in America.

THE YOUNG TIBETAN CLIMBERS

SONAM BHUMTSO 'One Hundred Thousand Beautiful Lakes'

Sonam Bhumtso, 15 years old – after joining Braille Without Borders' school in 2000 she became one of the first blind students to be integrated into a sighted elementary school. She speaks English, Chinese and Tibetan.

FOLLOWING THE FILM: Her ambition is to go to university, and become an international translator. This would make her the first blind university student ever from Tibet.

GYENSHEN 'Victory'

Gyenshen, 17 years old, had been selected for a scholarship to attend a good school in Beijing when he became blind at age 9. He was hidden in his home for four years, when he was found and brought into the school in Lhasa. He also now attends the same sighted school as Sonam Bhumtso and is considered by his teachers to be the smartest in the class.

FOLLOWING THE FILM: He is planning to go to Kerala, where he will learn how to establish another blind training center in Tibet. His mission is to rescue blind kids unable to escape horrible situations like the one he suffered.

DACHUNG 'Little Moon'

Dachung, 14 years old, joined the school in 2001. He has learned to speak and write in Chinese and Tibetan. Dachung says "When I climb I can show that blind people can do the same as sighted people can do. I am also sure that I can climb a mountain very well. I have no fear."

FOLLOWING THE FILM: Dachung's father died. Dachung is now studying vocational skills at the Braille Without Borders farm, which is close to his home village, allowing him to be near to his brothers.

KYILA 'Happy'

Kyila, 18 years old. Most of Kyila's family, including her father and her twin brothers, are blind. Originally from Lhatse and extremely poor, Kyila and her brothers joined the school in 1999. Her brothers have since returned home to make their own living. Kyila trained in the medical massage and physiotherapy program and started her own massage clinic, with the help of her friend Digi, who is also blind.

FOLLOWING THE FILM: Kyila went to the United Kingdom in order to study English for a year, and is now fluent. She has returned to Lhasa to assist in running the Braille Without Borders school.

TENZIN 'Keeper of the Buddha's Teaching'

Tenzin, 15 years old, was very well-accepted in his home village; the head of the village gave him the responsibility to herd the yaks, which greatly increased his self confidence and self esteem. Tenzin was the first child to join the school in 1998, and for two years he followed the preparatory school program. Tenzin speaks fluent Chinese and Tibetan, and his English is strong.

FOLLOWING THE FILM: Tenzin joined Tashi in the medical massage and physiotherapy training program.

TASHI 'Lucky'

Tashi, 19 years old - Born in a remote village in China 1000 km away, Tashi was sold to a Chinese couple when he was 10 years old. They brought him to Lhasa to beg for them but when Tashi didn't make enough money, they tortured him. Tashi ran away, becoming an orphan fighting off other street kids who beat him up and stole his money. Tashi joined the school in 1999 and became a trained medical massage therapist. He speaks fluent Chinese and Tibetan and his English is constantly improving.

FOLLOWING THE FILM: Tashi and Tenzin have now set up their medical massage clinic and business is booming.

BLINDSIGHT Log Line

BLINDSIGHT follows the gripping adventure of six Tibetan teenagers who set out to climb the 23,000 foot Lhakpa Ri on the north side of Mount Everest. A dangerous journey soon becomes a seemingly impossible challenge made all the more remarkable by the fact that the teenagers are blind.

BLINDSIGHT Long Synopsis

Set against the breathtaking backdrop of the Tibetan Himalayas, BLINDSIGHT is a gripping feature documentary, about six blind Tibetan teenagers whose lives are about to change. They have been rejected by a culture that considers them to be possessed by demons and have overcome enormous odds, helped hugely by attending a special school for the blind in Lhasa, set up by the inspirational blind teacher Sabriye Tenberken.

Erik Weißenmayer makes his imprint on the world through extraordinary physical accomplishments. Sabriye Tenberken takes the intellectual approach through education. Both of them have spent their adult lives achieving what most people would think impossible. Erik and Sabriye both went blind at the age of 12, he in America, she in Germany. Until 2004, they had never met.

Erik is a legend in the world of mountaineering. He is the only blind man ever to have scaled Mount Everest. He has also climbed the world's seven greatest peaks, a feat approximately 150 other mountaineers have achieved, all of them sighted.

Sabriye is known worldwide for changing the face of blindness in Tibet, a region where many believe blind people are paying for evils committed in a past life. Initially the Chinese were hesitant to allow her access to Tibet because of her blindness, but Sabriye persevered and made her way on horseback into the frozen Himalayas searching for blind children in remote villages to attend a school she was setting up in Lhasa.

Erik's summit of Mount Everest captured the imagination of Sabriye and her students. Determined to find out how he did it, Sabriye wrote to Erik explaining the hardships her kids had endured and their fascination with him. She invited him to visit and Erik accepted. But rather than just speak to the school, Erik brought his world-class Everest climbing team to Tibet so six chosen students could learn how to climb blind like him.

One of them is Tashi. His father sold him to a Chinese couple who took him to Lhasa and threw him on the streets to beg when he was 10 years old. After years of silence about his past, Tashi decided to find his family. We follow him in the search for his home to a remote region of southern China and watch first-hand as he confronts the father who abandoned him nine years before. BLINDSIGHT grips you with the

suspense of whether Tashi's deep scars will prevent him or propel him to his goal of making the summit with his hero Erik.

BLINDSIGHT chronicles the extraordinary adventure of a death-defying three week expedition up Lhakpa Ri, a dramatic 23,000 foot peak which rises symbolically and spectacularly beside Mount Everest.

BLINDSIGHT weaves the compelling life stories of students Kyila, Sonam Bhumtso, Tashi, Gyenshen, Dachung and Tenzin with this intense mountain drama into a riveting tapestry.

FULL CREDITS

Directed by
Produced by
Editor
Music by
Director of Photography
Executive Producer

Lucy Walker
Sybil Robson Orr
Sebastian Duthy
Nitin Sawhney
Petr Cikhart
Steven Haft

Featuring
(In alphabetical order):

Gavin Attwood
Sally Berg
Michael Brown
Sonam Bhumtso
Dachung
Jeff Evans
Gyenshen
Stefani Jackenthal
Paul Kronenberg
Kyila
Charley Mace
Steven Mace
Chris Morris
Tashi Pasang
Kami Tenzing Sherpa
Cornelia Tenberken
Sabriye Tenberken
Tenzin
Nguyen-Toan Tran
Ed Weißenmayer
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Erik Weißenmayer

Expedition
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Tenzin
Tserpen
Tsrin

Climbing Support

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Dorji
Gelyson
Glaysang
Kharmi Tenzin Sherpa
Lhakpa Tshering Sherpa
Renging Sherpa
Sonam Sherpa

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Travel Consultant – UK The Travel Company

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Engineer Dean James
Musicians Tenzin Youdon
Tsering Passang

“NIGHT AT THE CARAVANSERI”

Performed by The Silk Road Ensemble
With Yo-Yo Ma

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“TARANG (CURRENTS)”

Music by Sandeep Das
Performed by The Silk Road Ensemble
with Yo-Yo Ma

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“OASIS”

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“MAHUR”

Performed by Dariush Safvat & Bruno Caillat
Licensed courtesy of Smithsonian
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“NYING THOP”
Words and Music by Techung
Performed by Techung
Licensed courtesy of Techung

“BIAN XIN” (aka “Change of Heart”)
Words and Music by Zimig Gupa
Performed by Dachung, Gyenshen & Tenzin
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“ZHI AI” (aka “True Love”)
Words and Music by Zimig Gupa
Published by CRC Jianian Publishing (BMI)
Performed by children from Braille without Borders
and Zimig Gupa
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“EN QING” (aka “Gratitude”)
Written/Arranged by Penpatashi and Zimig Gupa
Performed by Dachung, Gyenshen & Tenzin
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“SACRED INSTRUMENTAL OFFERING”
Performed by The Nechung Monks
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Taken from Dharma Suna: music of wisdom and enjoyment
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Performed by the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA)

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“ICE PALACE”

Written and performed by Richard Blair Oliphant

Licensed courtesy of Richard Blair Oliphant

“HAPPY TOGETHER”

Words and Music by Alan Gordon & Gary Bonner

Performed by The Turtles

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www.blindsightthemovie.com

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*"The fear of climbing blind comes when I am reaching out to the darkness and I don't
know what I'm going to find. But I reached out that day and I found what I was looking
for."*

- Erik Weißenmayer

