



BILL HATCHER

Calypso, a beautiful classic (here led by Diane Connelly) in Eldo — and the author won't go near it.

Very superstitious

Wrestling with my fears

By Candace Horgan

Uh oh," said Elliott. It was Monday morning, and I was driving him to work on I-25 in Denver. Since the traffic is often atrocious, he had brought the paper.

"Climber killed in fall," he read. "A 37-year-old man died Sunday from injuries sustained in a fall while ice climbing in the Glacier Gorge area of Rocky Mountain National Park. Two climbers witnessed the fall and hiked out to get help. Rescuers reached him

in the early afternoon Bad weather prevented a helicopter rescue. The rescue team carried him four miles out on a litter, but the climber died en route."

The road blurred before me. I immediately wondered what route he had been on, whether he had been soloing or roped, and what the witnesses must have felt as they saw him plummet to the ground. I resolved, with the sort of curiosity I curse in

rubberneckers on the freeway, to check with a few friends in Estes Park and find out if they knew any more. I later discovered the climber had been soloing *All Mixed Up* when a section of ice detached, taking him with it.

Immediately I add this route to my mental list of those I won't venture on for a while. Call me superstitious: I am. At a gut level, I feel climbers might haunt the places where they died. Rationally I find the concept ludicrous. Yet I remember the story of

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two climbers at a Himalayan basecamp who heard footsteps circle their tent, even though they were the only two there. They later discovered a climber had perished on the same peak the year before.

I can't say I've felt the presence of a ghost, but I sense bad vibes near the scene of an accident. An interesting test, of course, would be whether I picked up these vibes even if I didn't know about an accident beforehand. Is it the knowing that does it? Probably.

Some climbing deaths and bad accidents tweak my emotions even though I don't know the deceased or partner and have never been anywhere near the scene of the accident. Kevin Bein's fatal fall on the Matterhorn hit me that way when I read about it, mostly because I pictured how his partner/wife, Barbara Devine, must have felt afterward descending in the storm.

A week after learning of the Glacier Gorge accident, I met somebody in the area who had often climbed with the *All Mixed Up* victim. He led a thin ice slab and then toproped some difficult mixed variations. I was surprised to see him climbing again so soon after his partner's death. Later that evening, I reflected on the different ways climbers deal with death.

Flashback to the spring of 1997. Elliott and I decided to take our then 7-year-old daughter climbing outside for the first time. She had climbed with us several times in the gym and wanted to try an outdoor route. We drove to Eldorado Canyon to do the *East Face of the Whale's Tail*, a two-pitch route that is mostly fourth class with an occasional spot of 5.2. I led the first pitch to a tree and brought the two of them up. Racking up to lead the second pitch, I looked around the canyon. As usual on a beautiful spring day, climbers were everywhere. I pointed to parties on the Bastille, Redgarden Wall, and Wind Tower, smiled at Elizabeth, and started the next pitch. Since the terrain was easy, I moved quickly and didn't place any gear.

About 80 feet out from the belay, I heard someone yell, "Falling!" and a loud impact. I glanced back at Wind Tower and fear ripped through me. Someone had fallen from near the top of the first pitch of *Calypso*. He had either run it out to the belay or a few pieces had pulled, because he had fallen about 30 feet. He hung upside down, unmoving. Climbers at the base of

the Wind Tower scrambled to reach him, while others ran for help. I took a deep breath, realized there was nothing I could do from here, and continued climbing. I practically ran to the first crack I saw, stuffed it with two bomber cams, clipped in, then moved on. From the stance below, Elizabeth and Elliot watched the activity on the Wind Tower.

"Is he going to be OK, Daddy?" she asked.

"I don't think so, kidlet," he answered. The climber still hadn't moved. I reached the top of the route and set the belay. Elliott and Elizabeth climbed simultaneously, so that Elliott could reassure and assist Elizabeth if need be. From the top of the face, they climbed down to the permanent anchors on the West Face. I quickly climbed to the stance and lowered them to the ground. Elizabeth found being lowered terrifying, and only her father's presence prevented her from losing it. I rapped down to them and coiled the rope, then we grabbed our packs at the base of the East Face. I didn't want to risk Elizabeth seeing a corpse brought down, so we hurried to the car. As we crossed South Boulder Creek, I glanced back at *Calypso* and saw that rescuers had placed the stricken climber (a fatality, I would later learn) in a litter and were lowering him. Several emergency vehicles waited on the road below, and a crowd of onlookers had gathered.

Elizabeth, with a child's attention span, took the emergency vehicles in stride. In the car on the way home, she seemed to forget the accident and her fear while being lowered. "That was fun," she said. Elliott and I glanced at each other, relieved that the accident hadn't become the focus of the day. Later that summer, Elizabeth followed us up a three-pitch 5.4 on Lumpy Ridge and loved it, even though she got so tired on the hike down the trail I had to carry her. I'm sure that we could take her back to Eldorado and, though she might remember the accident, it wouldn't have the emotional impact it did for me. Indeed, she could probably climb *Calypso* with no difficulty.

I, on the other hand, haven't ventured onto *Calypso* since. I've seen several other accidents on that route as well, and even though I've climbed it half a dozen times before, the idea of climbing it again makes me queasy.

Over the years, my superstitions about routes where fatalities or accidents have occurred has affected my climbing in different ways. After I witness or hear about an

accident or death, I stay away from the route for a while, at least six months. The one time I broke from this policy, climbing *Werk Supp* a month after seeing someone deck on the second pitch, I felt sketchy. At the crux pitch, even though I was seconding, my hands sweated, I couldn't concentrate, and I wanted to be anywhere else.

Perhaps no climb affects me as deeply, though, as the Mount Lincoln icefall, near Breckenridge, Colorado. Five years ago, I was living in New York City and plotting every day how I could move to Colorado. A few months before I moved, an acquaintance's fiancé was killed in a fall on Mount Lincoln. The woman was informed of the death the day she was to leave New York and join him in Colorado.

I remember her angry reaction when one of the fiancé's close friends went to the climbing gym after he heard the news. She thought the guy was an insensitive jerk, but I wondered if perhaps he felt more connected to his friend's memory through climbing.

The following November, I went to Mount Lincoln, his accident site, for the first time. On the dirt road to Montgomery Reservoir my partner drove his truck into a roadside ditch, requiring hours of work to dig out. Despite the inauspicious start, he still wanted to go climbing. Then, while leading the second pitch, he fell. I had been uneasy the whole day, beginning with the mishap with the truck, and seeing him fall — the first time I had ever seen someone fall on ice — made a bad day much worse. That death had been in my mind from the time of the approach, and I wanted to leave as soon as possible. From the top of the route, we walked off. As we passed the place where the climber fell the previous winter, I felt a chill pass through me.

Five years later, I still have the same reaction. I am always extra careful not to slip as I cross the ice at the top of a 50-foot pillar where he fell. And at this point I know of so many weird things happening at Lincoln that I even think up excuses not to go there. That partner of mine scared himself with another fall there two weeks later. The following year, an acquaintance witnessed a solo climber's 200-foot fall down the main gully. Last fall, someone I was with at Lincoln slipped on a patch of ice at the base and rapidly slid towards the talus field. Just before he hit, he managed to grab a patch of branches and stop himself.

EVENTS

June 26, Jackson, Wyoming Women That Rock.

A women's workshop that promotes and teaches safe climbing practices and individual responsibility in every genre of climbing. Proceeds benefit the Access Fund, The American Alpine Club, The Nation's Missing Children Organization, and the Center For Missing Adults. Also happening July 16-18 at Donner Summit, California, and September 24-26 at Red Rocks, Nevada. Contact: Roanne Miller at 970-453-7558 (email: Roannem@aol.com), or Mattie Shear at 307-733-3580 (email: Mshear@aol.com).

July 11-17, Denver, Colorado ASCF Junior Pro Camp.

Week-long competition-climbing course coached by the members of the US National Team. Contact: 888-ASCF-ROX.

August 11-15, Boulder, Colorado Sheclimbs Annual Gathering.

Sheclimbs is a not-for-profit women's organization dedicated to promoting and fostering personal growth, self-reliance, self-esteem, and confidence through climbing. The gathering includes slide shows, clinics, and climbing trips in the Front Range. Contact: Debbie Brooks at 719-227-0997; (email: twoclimbers@earthlink.net); (web: members.aol.com/sheclimbs/).

August 21, Rifle Mountain Park, Colorado Rifle clean-up day.

September, Nialthi, Pakistan UIAA International Expedition Training Camp.

Training in all aspects of mountaineering for climbers between the ages of 18 and 25. The camp, directed by UIAGM guides, is open to all nationalities and lasts 30 days. Cost is approximately \$1500 per participant. Contact: Joss Lynam (president UIAA Expeditions Commission), 7 Sorbonne, Ardilea Estate, Dublin 14, Ireland; (353) 1-288-4672; (353) 1-283-1993 (fax); (email: joss@indigo.ie).

October 2-9, Yucca Valley, California American Search and Rescue Institute Technical Rescue Courses.

Contact: AMSAR, 56925 Yucca Tr., Suite 142-S, Yucca Valley, CA 92284-3752; 760-228-0933 (web: <http://amsar@amsar.net>).

October 14-17, New Delhi, India International Adventure Expo '99.

Contact: Ram Narayan, Janaky International Corporation, 385 Tremont Avenue, Kenmore, NY 14217, USA; 716-875-9976; 716-874-6578 (fax); (web: www.indiaintl.com).

November 3-7, Banff, Alberta Banff Mountain Film and Book Festivals.

Contact: The Banff Centre For Mountain Culture, P.O. Box 1020, Stn. 38, 107 Tunnel Mountain Drive, Banff, Alberta, Canada T0L 0C0; 403-762-6369; 403-762-6277 (fax); (email: CMC@BanffCentre.AB.CA); (web: www.banffcentre.ab.ca/CMC/).

COMPETITIONS

SUMMER X GAMES

June 25-July 3, San Francisco, California.

EASTERN CANADIAN CLIMBING TOUR

August 28-29, Montreal, Quebec
October 24, Ottawa, Ontario
November 20, Ottawa, Ontario
For more information contact Sacha at 514-737-6853 (email: sachad@total.net).

THE NORTH FACE/LASPORTIVA JCCA YOUTH CLIMBING SERIES

Southeast
July 10, Doraville, Georgia, 770-242-7625.

Colorado
June 26, Boulder, 303-447-2804.
July 10, Thornton, 303-254-6299.

South-Central
July 10, Blue Springs, Missouri, 816-228-9988.

Mid-Atlantic
July 10, Greensboro, North Carolina, 336-665-0662.

Midwest
June 26, Evanston, Illinois, 847-866-6790.
July 10, Madison, Wisconsin, 608-244-8100.

Big Sky
June 19, Cody, Wyoming, 307-587-5222.

New England
July 10, Nashua, New Hampshire, 603-886-6789.

Northeast
June 19, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, 412-247-7334.
July 10, Alexandria, Virginia, 703-212-7625.

Northern California
June 27, Santa Cruz, 831-454-9254.
July 10, San Francisco, 415-550-0515.

Ohio River Valley
June 26, Lexington, Kentucky, 606-253-3673.
July 3, Louisville, Kentucky, 502-266-5833.
July 10, Bloomington, Indiana, 812-824-6414.

Pacific Northwest
July 10, Tualatin, Oregon, 503-968-4535.

Southern California
June 26, Costa Mesa, 714-556-7625.
July 10, Upland, 909-931-5991.

Southwest
June 19, Las Vegas, Nevada, 702-254-5604.
July 10, Upland, California, 909-931-5991.

Texas
June 26, Houston, Texas, 713-973-7625.
July 10, Austin, Texas, 512-416-9299.

JCCA Nationals

July 31-August 1, Richmond, Virginia, 804-897-6800.
For more info about the JCCA Youth Climbing Series call 888-788-5222 (web: www.juniorclimbing.org).

1999 WORLD CUP

July 24-25, Beauregard, Italy (speed).
September 3-5, Courmayeur, Italy (difficulty).
September 17-18, Milan, Italy (difficulty).
November 12-14, Kranj, Slovenia (difficulty).

1999 BOULDERING WORLD CUP

July 3-4, Benasque, Spain.
July 11-12, Val D'Isere, France.
July 17-18, Chamonix, France.
July 31-August 1, Bardonecchia, Italy.
August 13-14, Cortina, Italy.
August 21-22, Crans Montana, Switzerland.
August 28-29, Grenoble, France.

MASTERS/INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

June 19-20, Marseille, France (difficulty).
July 22-24, Serre Chevalier, France (difficulty).
July 28-29, Argentiere-la-Bessee, France (bouldering).
September 10-11, Rockmaster, Arco, Italy (difficulty).
December 7-9, Sheffield, England (bouldering).

WORLD YOUTH CHAMPIONSHIP

September 10-11, Courmayeur, Italy.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

December 3-5, Birmingham, England.

Competition dates often change. Competitors should confirm all events. Climbing is glad to list upcoming events; please send information at least two months before publication date.

Over the last several years, as I have grown ever closer to my daughter, my relationship to climbing has changed, and at least part of that is a result of the deaths and accidents I have witnessed — and, of course, my pesky superstitions. When Elliott and I went to Denali last spring, Elizabeth was not worried about our dying, but was upset because she wouldn't hear from us for four weeks. She wanted me to bring my laptop so we could email each other. At least once, I've considered taking a sabbatical from climbing. I was feeling burnt out and wondering if I was due for an accident after witnessing or hearing about so many. I thought that perhaps taking some time away from climbing might rekindle my passion. Then I thought of Elizabeth. I remembered her smiles at the belays, her joy at reaching the top, and the pleasure she took in moving upwards with

two people she loves. Such feelings were what hooked me on climbing when I started.

Four years ago, at one of Mark Twight's slide shows, I was shocked that he ended his presentation with a list of climbers he knew who had died. It was titled "To be continued ...". Now I realize he was being honest. My superstitions — and sorrows — affect me in ways I can hardly explain, let alone control. I don't think about car wrecks when I drive on I-25, so why do I feel the way I do about certain climbs? I don't know. But I'll continue to throw salt over my shoulder and walk around ladders, and I'm telling my friend I can't go to Mount Lincoln next weekend because I've got to go to the dentist.

Candace Horgan is a freelance writer living in Denver. She has a heavy-duty ice-climbing habit, and spends what other little free time she has at concerts by jam bands.



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