Summit Strategies: Secrets to Mastering the Everest in Your Life

Gary P. Scott

Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing, Inc, 2003

US \$13.95, 128 pages, softcover

David Breashears said of this book “We all have an Everest to climb and master in our lives. This book gives the steps to take to help you overcome your doubts and fears and move closer to your dreams.”

Gary Scott is an accomplished mountaineer and guide who has compiled hard-learned lessons from his climbing career into 10 pearls of wisdom that apply to everyday life. The lessons, laid out in 10 chapters, tell stories from expeditions that teach a valuable principle that the author goes on to translate into routine situations of daily life. “Choose Your Mountain” (identify your goal), “Lighten Your Load” (remove the clutter from your life), and “Find Your Pace” (determine a timeframe in which to reach your goals) are just 3 of the 10 enlightening chapters.

The theories in these lessons will teach nothing new to anyone who spends much time in the self-help section of their bookstore. But for mountaineers who don’t count Deepak Chopra among their favorite authors, Scott’s approach to life strategizing may be refreshing (and familiarly illustrated). Kind of like “Dr Phil goes to the mountains.”

On a personal note, I had the opportunity to befriend Gary at Mt Everest during his second summit attempt in 2003. It was an unsuccessful and tragic bid for Scott. As I watched him endure serious personal illness and the death of his friend and climbing Sherpa, Karma, I was impressed by Gary’s extraordinary character and ability to think outside his own personal discomfort and misfortune. He doesn’t just talk the talk, he really does walk the walk.

This book will appeal to anyone interested in personal growth, from a mountaineer preparing for a challenging expedition to a college student preparing for a job interview. It’s an easy, quick read and a good pep talk for anyone facing life’s challenges.

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Birding on Borrowed Time

Phoebe Snetsinger

Colorado Springs, CO: American Birding Association, 2003

US \$19.85, 307 pages, 45 illustrations, softcover

Phoebe Snetsinger was perhaps the most obsessive bird-watcher of modern times. During a lifetime of birding

she saw—and clearly identified—more than 8000 species around the world. She did not come to birding early in life and was 34 when she suddenly recognized the beauty and incredible variety of bird species waiting to be seen. However, once she had become enthusiastic, there was no stopping her.

Birding is usually thought of as a safe, benign hobby for people not interested in wilder, more dangerous sports, but during her experiences as a world traveler and adventurer, Phoebe Snetsinger faced many emergencies. The first emergency was the diagnosis in 1972 of a malignant melanoma in the middle of her back. As the years passed by, she had several recurrences, but this never diminished her determination to see as many species as possible. After her personal discovery of the third recurrence she decided not to tell anyone, including her husband, and went on a birding trip to Australia, thinking that she probably had metastases throughout her body. On her return, she told her doctor about the discovery that the lesion had grown in the weeks she had been away, but that she had decided to go on the trip, no matter what the outcome. To her surprise and pleasure, her doctor listened to her story and said, “I think that, under the circumstances, I would have done the same.” She says in the book that she could have kissed him.

She survived an earthquake in Costa Rica, and, with her husband, was attacked by a gang in New Guinea. She was taken into the forest and gang-raped by 5 men. When the gang had disappeared, she and her husband had a harrowing escape to a friendly village.

Incidents of this sort did not slow down her enthusiasm and determination. Ironically, after surviving malignant melanoma and vicious attacks, she was killed in a van accident in Madagascar while napping on a back seat.

Phoebe designed a bird classification system for keeping records of her own. (Examples of her handwritten notes are in the book.) She also held a strong view that hearing a bird was not sufficient. In order to add the bird to your life list, you must see it and identify it clearly.

If this book had been a graphic account of her travels and adventures—and there were plenty of both—it would appeal to the ordinary reader, but the frequent accounting of exotic birds seen detracts from the readability of the book, for example, “Offsetting such major and minor problems, we found a staggering number of really special birds, such as the Thick-billed Cuckoo, Boehm’s Bee-eater, Pale-Billed Hornbill, Blue swallow, Bocage’s and Sharpe’s Kalatas, Fuellborn’s Longclaw, Souza’s Shrike, Anchieta’s Sunbird, Bar-winged Weaver and Locustfinch.” Balanced against this disadvantage are the beautiful pencil illustrations of many of the spe-