



AAC Publications

Chad Kellogg, 1971–2014

On the 10th of February, as he was headed out the door with partner Jens Holsten to attempt Fitz Roy, Chad emailed me with instructions to have a specific bouquet delivered to his sweetheart Mandy back home in Seattle on Valentine's Day. Tragically, the delivery of that bouquet coincided with his death by rockfall during their descent from Fitz Roy.

Nurtured in the fertile environment of Cascadia and the Seattle climbing community, Chad's life was marked by a prodigious commitment to climbing. While he never achieved the elite technical ability to push the limits of the rock, ice, and mixed grading scales, he was a cardiovascular locomotive, and he had an unparalleled capability and desire to endure suffering in the mountains. This led him up mountains all over the world, many new routes, and several speed records. He rented out both his houses in Seattle in favor of living out of his truck and taking as many as three major expeditions each year, often two to the Nepalese Himalaya and another to China or South America. These were funded largely through his own labor doing residential remodeling and construction, plus a few reliable sponsors like Outdoor Research, and occasionally complemented by grants such as the Mugs Stump and Lyman Spitzer awards.

His persistence at his chosen objectives was bewildering: three attempts at a speed record on Mt. Everest, two attempts on a new route on the most difficult face on the unclimbed Lunag Ri with plans for a third, the first American to solo a new route on the south face of Aconcagua, the epic first ascent of the southwest ridge of Siguniang, just to name a few. A 50-hour single push, a midnight solo blizzard training session on Mt. Rainier ending in a self-rescue with a shattered arm—this type of thing was Chad's go-to entertainment. Failure, injury, and terrible personal loss, particularly the death of his wife Lara in a climbing accident in 2007, only added fuel to his persistence.

But there was much more to him than hard-edged perseverance. Wherever he was, he found opportunities to help people and keep things working right, sometimes even at the expense of his personal missions. In spite of his propensity to go solo, he really loved climbing with his friends, cracking bad puns and jokes with a toothy grin. Through his climbing pursuits, his devotion to his friends and his community, and his newfound Buddhist faith, he had overcome many of the demons that had haunted him and was finally at peace. Even so, he was not ready to leave us—he was only ready to begin teaching us the lessons of his life: that life is too short, it can end at any moment for any reason, and each day is a gift. Do not hesitate to grab your dreams, for tomorrow they may be out of reach.

—Dan Aylward

The following obituary with additional biographical details, written by Dan Aylward and Ric Kellogg, appeared in slightly different form in the Seattle Times on February 23, 2014. It is published here with permission of the authors.

Chad Kellogg was born in Omak, Washington, on September 22, 1971, to Richard and Peggy Kellogg. He spent his first year in Winthrop, Washington, where his parents were pastors of the Assembly of God Church. Chad didn't remember that first year, but the two million acres of mountain wilderness around Winthrop must have affected him, because he was headed to the mountains the rest of his life. His first trip on the Pacific Crest Trail was in the summer of 1972. In 1973, Chad moved to Kenya with his parents, where he was raised in Kisumu town. Chad returned to the U.S. in 1980 with his

parents and new brother, Shawn. He finished growing up in Brier, Washington, where he had a big, treed backyard to build whatever he wanted.

Chad was very competitive, athletic, and interested in the outdoors from an early age. He enjoyed hiking on family trips to places such as Yosemite the Wind River Range. During his high school years, a climber by the name of Dan Waters lived in the basement of his family home. Chad just seemed to soak up every bit of information about climbing, and quickly grew to love it.

Chad tried out for the U.S. luge training team after high school and was accepted. He raced on the World Cup circuit in Europe and North America, living in Lake Placid, New York, from 1990 to 1994. He tried out for the 1992 and 1994 Olympic luge teams, and was a runner-up. He was disappointed, but then rediscovered climbing in a big way.

In the mid-'90s, Chad worked as a climbing ranger at Mt. Rainier National Park. During this time he solidified his friendships with fellow climbing rangers at a time when the team was a crack group of young and ambitious climbers put together by head ranger Mike Gauthier. Many from that group went on to have very successful international climbing careers of their own, and became regular climbing partners for Chad. On March 10, 2000, he married his first great love, Lara Bitenieks, a fellow Mt. Rainier ranger who was a full-blooded Latvian.

Chad attended the University of Washington, where he was a member of Delta Tau Delta fraternity. He graduated with honors in economics in 2000, after diversions for luge and mountain climbing. He worked briefly for a dot-com startup and then for Expeditors International, but then he ramped up his commitment to the mountains by leaving his corporate job and joining his father-in-law, Robert Bitenieks, in the much more flexible profession of house remodeling and construction. He created a lifestyle with Lara that included long climbing expeditions, sometimes together and sometimes separate, punctuated by stints of furious labor to support their climbing habits.

In 2007, while on a climbing expedition in China, he received word that his wife had been killed in a climbing accident on Mt. Wake in Alaska. This shook him greatly, and marked the start of a dark time in his life. Over the next five years, he endured a bout with colon cancer and the deaths of 17 people close to him, including his younger brother Shawn. With his legendary determination, he pulled himself through, learning Buddhist meditation and making explicit decisions to live his life without a wasted moment, focusing on the most important things to him: his climbing and his people. He would do whatever was necessary to climb: making just enough money get by, sleeping in the back of his pickup truck at job sites after renting out his houses, nurturing his relationships with sponsors such as Outdoor Research (who used his thoughtful feedback to improve their products), and usually leaving his finances in a very precarious state but always managing to pull it off. At the same time, he would clearly identify the people in his life that meant the most to him and make sure they knew he cared about them. He had a persistent awareness that life was precious and temporary, and would stop at nothing to make his climbing goals become reality.

In 2012 Chad met Mandy Kraus, and they very quickly fell in love. The change in his demeanor was obvious to those around him; his dark years were officially over. Mandy, a distance runner, would run up and down Mt. Si with him, and they made plans for much longer runs. While not officially engaged, they did not hide their intention to get married, build a house in the Methow Valley, and raise a family. In November, Chad called his dad from Nepal and asked him to save some solar panels for the house. All of the plans are now dust, but Chad will be remembered as an exceptional climber, a loving friend, a great son, and a man with a tender heart.

—Dan Aylward and Ric Kellogg

Images



Chad Kellogg on the summit of Lara Shan in China after the first ascent.



Chad Kellogg trekking in Nepal.



Chad Kellogg on the summit of Bear Mountain in Washington.

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