



AAC Publications

Cole Kennedy, 1990 – 2014

It's a strange thing to be there for a person's last moments: to see someone go from bursting with light and energy to being gone forever in an instant. It can be hard to fathom just how much is irretrievably lost in that tiny flash—not just that person, but all the little pieces of their personality that made them who they were.

Cole Kennedy was killed in July 2014 when a collapsing cornice swept the northwest couloir of Piramide de Garcilaso in Peru, where we were climbing together. In those few brief seconds the climbing world lost an incredibly driven and strong climber; his family lost a hilarious and unbelievably smart son; and many others, including myself, lost an incredible friend.

Cole and I met during our freshman year of college. Of all the new and exciting things we were exposed to, none captivated us quite like climbing. Within a year, we were driving all over the Southwest—to the Black Canyon, to Castle Valley, to Nevada—in search of rock. We took some big falls; we got benighted; we got lost in the woods; we had run-ins with various deans around campus; and Cole started to climb hard...really hard. As an upperclassman, many of Colorado College's climbers really looked up to him as a humble, strong guy with a bit of a wild side.

After school, climbing and skiing were his priorities—and rightly so, as he was a natural at both. He became a true all-rounder, soon boasting a resume replete with both ice and alpine routes up to WI5 and V11 boulder problems. By the time he left for Peru he had redpointed 5.13b.

Being partners with Cole was simultaneously frustrating and inspiring. You would lead a pitch and feel like you were at your absolute limit. He would follow you so casually and so smoothly that you immediately started racking your brain for excuses, even though he hadn't said anything. At first, you would write it off: "That pitch was just his style." But later, the style would change, and he'd be kicking your ass just as hard, and you'd run out of excuses.

Really, what it came down to was that Cole just knew how to really try hard at things, and because of that he could succeed at anything he chose to. When he found something he loved, he drove himself to be the absolute best that he could be in that thing and derived real satisfaction in pushing his own physical and mental limits.

He seemed to have an innate understanding of the mental barriers people placed before themselves. He was never judgmental of others' abilities, and he was calm, encouraging, and matter-of-fact in a way that made you feel comfortable pushing yourself. Anyone who spent time in the mountains with Cole could sense the true excitement he felt for others achieving their goals, and they respected him for his ability to ignore self-imposed limitations and just climb whatever looked like the most fun.

Every climber out there has a checklist of requirements that they look for in any serious partner—not just a list of grades or requisite safety skills, but a certain type of personality. An absolute calm, self-confidence, and ridiculous sense of humor in all situations, no matter how dire—that was Cole. He believed that there was always room for moments of complete and total nonsense in the mountains, no matter how serious the situation was supposed to be.

Cole was the one you could always count on when you weren't feeling up to a hard or scary lead; the

one you were glad you were with when things didn't go according to plan; the standard to which every partner should both seek out and aspire to be.

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Images



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