



## AAC Publications

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### Hayden Kennedy, 1990 – 2017

**Eleven years ago, on an ordinary cold spring morning in Castle Valley, Utah, I met a 16-year-old kid who unexpectedly would become my best friend.** The memory is still vivid. After frantically trying to catch an inspiring father-son climbing team out in front of us on the Rectory all morning, I reached out my hand to introduce myself to a proud dad. Although I didn't recognize him until he said his name, he was my climbing hero Michael Kennedy, and his son was Hayden.

Over the next ten years, Hayden and I would return to the desert many, many times in search of adventure. Our friendship took us to some of the wildest places in North America and gave me some of the richest experiences of my life. As Hayden grew older, I realized that he quickly absorbed the knowledge of his mentors and used that understanding to express his talent toward his own vision for what adventure meant to him.

It was truly an honor to watch Hayden become one of the greatest climbers of our time. His unlimited talent, ability, and futuristic vision took him to summits most alpinists had only dreamt of—new routes on K7 and the Ogre in Pakistan, a new route on Cerro Kishtwar in India, the first “fair means” ascent of Cerro Torre's southeast ridge, and many, many more. Along with the enormous influence of his family, the mountains forged Hayden's depth and character. He approached his community, friends, family, and the mountains he passed through with profound humility, respect, and a deep gratitude.

With Hayden you always knew where he stood. While choosing his path in life, he wouldn't hesitate to admit his struggles in finding the right balance of life, love, and his passion for climbing. He shared his dreams with those close to him, whether it was climbing a virgin summit in unexplored India, starting a bakery and cafe in downtown Lander, or his vision for life with his sweet partner Inge Perkins.

In Hayden's own words, climbing was a very small part of his life, yet the lessons he learned from it affected all of life's aspects. Hayden learned to listen to his instincts, to question his own ego, and to pursue many things other than the mountains. He was a musician, a bread baker, a voracious reader, and a hopeless romantic. Hayden took the time to really listen in conversation and to connect with anyone he found himself sharing a room with. Despite being among the best in the world at his craft, he realized that learning was where the magic lay in life and that he always needed to learn from those around him.

The news of Hayden's death took me to the ground. The thought of him not in our lives is a reality that is still hard to accept for all of us. His friends miss the gum wrappers left in our cup holders, the unawareness of his open mouth chomping food, the morning egg tortilla dish he had mastered, and the continuous blatant and profound honesty he offered all of us. We all miss the countless rounds of “would you rather,” the random postcards from his latest travels, and the daily photos of the bread loaves he had just proudly baked.

Almost exactly ten years after meeting him in Castle Valley, Hayden and I returned there together one last time. Atop of Castleton Tower, I tried to say good-bye to him as he sat in the form of white crystalline ash in my palm. Opening my hand to the wind and watching him return to the earth, I realized that saying good-bye to Hayden will be a lifetime process—one that I never will fully be able to complete. I try to think of Hayden as a gift, a gift that you can't keep but one that you can live. Hayden's example, and aspiring to be a bit more like Hayden, is his greatest gift to us, his community,

and for that we are so grateful.

– Jesse Huey

## Images



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