



AAC Publications

Charlotte Fox, 1957 – 2018

Charlotte Fox was strong and good in the mountains, not known for speed so much as being able to go and go and go. She climbed Everest in 1996, surviving the famous nighttime “huddle,” with her eyes and contact lenses freezing and patches of frostbite dotting her face and feet, though fortunately she kept all her toes. Her high climbs were mostly guided, but she was prepared: Before Everest, she had also climbed Gasherbrum II (on a private expedition, not guided) and Cho Oyu. (She was the first American woman to do three 8000-meter peaks and eventually climbed five of them.) She had climbed all 54 of Colorado’s 14ers, involving all kinds of terrain and weather. Other climbs included Aconcagua, various high peaks in Peru, Mt. Vinson in Antarctica and all the other Seven Summits. She had ski-patrolled for 30 years, in Aspen and then Telluride (and saved every patrol uniform she was ever given). She had so much energy she would run or skin up a mountain before a full day of patrolling.

In May she had just turned 61 and had recently climbed two 8,000-meter peaks—Dhaulagiri, known as a hard mountain, in 2017, and Manaslu in 2016. She had just returned home to Telluride on May 3 from attempting Baruntse in Nepal.

Charlotte had survived so much up high that it was stunning and profoundly sad that she died that evening of May 24 in a household accident. Friends who were staying at her home for Mountainfilm returned to the house at perhaps 10:45 p.m. to discover that Charlotte had apparently fallen down one of the steep flights of hardwood stairs in her 4.5-story, 77-stair house, which is entered via the top floor. (She never took the elevator, even when rehabbing a knee injury.) She apparently had died immediately of injuries from the fall.

Somehow the scene, sorrowful as it was, was indicative of her life. Her house was full, with three friends already staying and two more soon to arrive, because she was a giver: generous and open-hearted. She loved Mountainfilm and the mountain community.

Having met and often rock climbed with Charlotte, starting when she lived in Aspen, I had been planning to stay at the house too, and as I drove a somber several hours to Telluride, kind friends having offered me last-minute couch space, I thought of her spirit and warm heart. All weekend I heard examples like those I’d enjoyed several times over the years, including when I’d brought along my then 10- or 11-year-old son, Roy, to Telluride for bike or ski races. He dearly loved her avalanche dog, Max, and would lie on the floor patting him while Charlotte and I caught up. (Max the dog—more recently it was Gus the dog—was a welcome attendee at American Alpine Club board meetings in the six years that she was a board member.) Charlotte gave and gave to the climbing community and many other causes, both from her pocketbook and of her time, energy, and organizational efforts. She was a board member of the Access Fund for many years, and long involved in Mountainfilm as well. Her final Seven Summits ascent, of Mt. Elbrus in 2014, was part of a team benefit for the dZi Foundation for underserved communities in the remote Himalaya. Her alma mater, Hollins University, has a Charlotte Fox Climbing Wall.

Kristen Hughes, a Telluride friend, stayed in Charlotte’s house during convalescence from knee surgery, and when Kristen’s mother died during the recession of 2008, as the daughter was scraping to make her mortgage payments and keep her house, Charlotte lent her the money for an expensive last-minute flight home. “She had such a big heart,” Kristen says. “If you were in trouble, she didn’t hesitate. She did what it took to help. She was always there for you.”

Charlotte was long an advocate for women in climbing and in leadership positions in the community. Another old friend, Andrea Cutter, remembers her saying, "Sisters stick together!"

Originally from Greensboro, North Carolina, Charlotte was famous for her courtesy, sending thank-you cards, cards for birthdays (people say she never missed them), and get-well cards. She once treated 14 people to a heli-ski trip in the Selkirks.

We loved her sense of humor, her deep sudden laugh, and her cheery gruffness—"Are you coming or not?!" she might say. Many noticed her loyalty and discretion. She avoided bad-mouthing.

Charlotte gained unexpected fame with the attention given to the Everest disaster, but she steered clear of the hubbub, mostly avoiding interviews, movie negotiations, and even the topic itself. I remember asking her about her feelings that night in the huddle on Everest, which looked likely to be the end. She laughed, saying, "I thought, 'Well, old girl, it's been a good ride. No regrets.'"

She experienced much tragedy in her life, on Everest and also with the loss of her husband, Reese Martin, then 49, who died in a paragliding event in 2004. Earlier, she had been seriously involved with Mark Bebie of Washington State, who died in 1993 on the ice climb Slipstream in the Canadian Rockies.

Charlotte had her quirks and faults, was stubborn and did things her way, but she was loving and beloved. "She loved the mountains, she loved her dogs, she loved her friends, and she loved her Chardonnay," says Molly Garland, a friend of many decades.

We think of her as a climber, but she was a skier and community person, too. She belonged to book clubs in both Aspen and, when she moved there, Telluride.

I like thinking that she was in a good place in her life. A week before she died, Charlotte had told Deb Curtis, of her 8000-meter peaks, "I'm doin' one more, Curtis." At a dinner with a handful of her friends after the memorial, I repeated a line that Charlotte had said to friends the day she died, "I love being 61." At least three people said, "Oh, she told me the same thing!"

– Alison Osius

Editor's note: In tribute to Charlotte Fox, friends raised more than \$53,000 for the dZi Foundation to rebuild a school in Maheswori, Nepal, that was destroyed in the earthquake of 2015. The new school is expected to be completed by 2019.

Images



Charlotte Fox.



Charlotte Fox climbing in East Vail, Colorado.

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