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Edge of the Map: The Mountain Life of Christine Boskoff

By Johanna Garton

EDGE OF THE MAP: THE MOUNTAIN LIFE OF CHRISTINE BOSKOFF. Johanna Garton. Mountaineers Books, 2020. Paperback, 240 pages, \$19.95.

Johanna Garton's *Edge of the Map* follows the life and high-altitude climbs of Christine Boskoff, a widely admired and accomplished mountaineer from Appleton, Wisconsin, whose body was found after an avalanche in a remote range of China in 2006. Though Garton spent time trekking in the Himalaya as a young woman, she is not a climber, making her devotion to the story and life of Boskoff, a stranger, all the more moving.

Boskoff was ebullient, open, and unpretentious, her passion for the mountains clear and without ego. "Christine takes pain very well," said Austrian climber Peter Habeler when interviewed about Boskoff for *Outside* in 2001. To be one of the women in the upper echelons of mountaineering at the time required fortitude, and Boskoff had it in spades.

Boskoff's life was impacted by the much-chronicled tragic events of the 1996 storm on Everest that took the lives of eight climbers. One of the climbers who perished, Scott Fischer, was the owner of Seattle-based guiding company Mountain Madness. Boskoff had crossed paths with him in 1995 on Broad Peak, her first 8,000-meter summit. After Fischer's death, Christine and her husband, Keith Boskoff, bought Mountain Madness, shifting Boskoff's relationship with mountaineering from personal to professional.

Garton is methodical, patient, and thorough, and her exhaustive research lays out important mountaineering history, the science and experience of being at high altitude, as well as the tangled cultural and political fabric of Tibet and China. Her prose and dialogue are imaginative and textured. We see Boskoff's smiling face and hear her frustration as she learns the ways of the mountains. We are right next to her as she climbs Broad Peak. We celebrate with her when she summits Everest, but join in her disappointment when she isn't able to do it without supplemental oxygen. Garton takes us to the valley where she was last alive with her partner Charlie Fowler. We feel their last moments as Garton imagines them, tingling while reading what it is like to be enveloped by avalanche, based on first-hand survivor accounts.

I was grateful for Garton's willingness to discuss the often-sidestepped topic of Indigenous beliefs and customs, and how they often are dissonant from the pursuits of the mountaineer. I do wonder if, had she been less emotionally attached to Boskoff's family and her legacy, whether she would have been able to go deeper, further questioning Boskoff and Fowler's decision to pursue a peak, Genyen, that local Tibetan monks had clearly indicated they wanted left alone to the spirits.

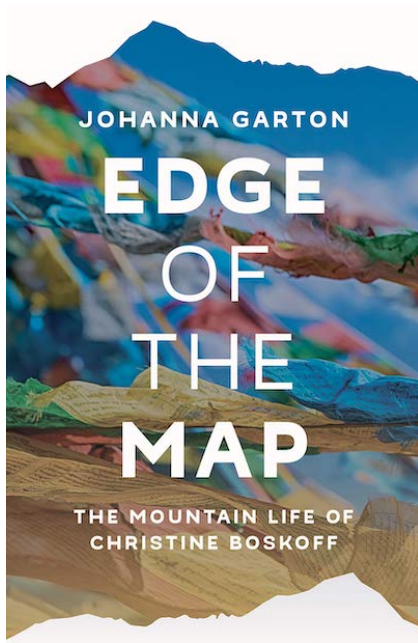
In an author's note, we learn that Garton grew up in the same small Wisconsin town as Boskoff, and learned of her disappearance through Garton's own mother, a close friend of Boskoff's mother, Joyce. For four years, Garton's mother, also a writer, poured herself into learning everything she could about Boskoff's life. Within a year of being diagnosed with Parkinson's, Garton's mother handed all of her hard work to her daughter, who inherited it with great purpose.

Christine Boskoff comes across as full of light and joy, despite being drawn to the danger and

accepting the potentially dire consequences of high-altitude mountaineering. Boskoff's mother, Joyce, received a giant teddy bear and a dozen roses from her daughter on her birthday, three days after she was killed in an avalanche on the other side of the world. Johanna Garton may not be a high-altitude junkie or a wall rat, but she is a daughter who understands devotion.

— Sasha Turrentine

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