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RISING: BECOMING THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN WOMAN ON EVEREST

BY SHARON WOOD

RISING: BECOMING THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN WOMAN ON EVEREST. Sharon Wood.
Mountaineers Books, 2019. Hardcover, 272 pages, \$19.95.

In 1986, Canadian alpinist and mountain guide Sharon Wood became the first North American woman to summit Everest. Now, more than 30 years later, she's sharing her story.

Rising is a detailed, specific, focused account of the 70 days Wood and her teammates spent climbing the challenging west ridge of Everest. Of the team of ten climbers, only Wood and her partner Dwayne Congdon reached the top, and their successful summit route via a new variation—and without Sherpa support—has never been repeated.

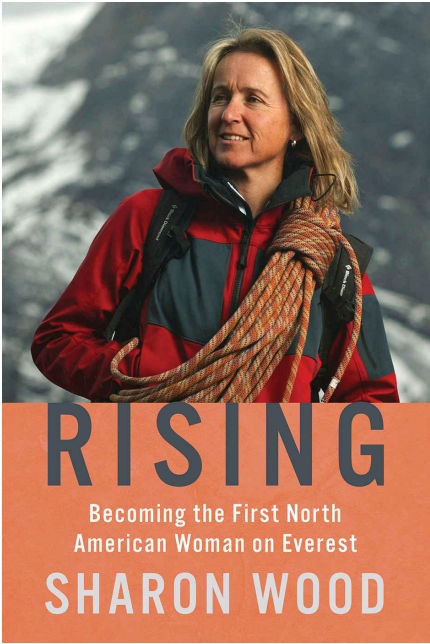
This book reads like a thoughtful real-time expedition log: The team arrives at base camp, starts moving up the mountain, and addresses each challenge as it comes. While most books about Everest involve extensive history, science, logistics, route beta, weather, and/or other background information, *Rising* is strikingly devoid of details that aren't relevant to Wood's specific tale. "As overbearing friends can be, Everest wanted this book to be about it," she writes. "But the mountain merely serves as a stage and a timeline for the real story."

What, then, is the real story? The media had one suggestion, pitting Wood against the other female climber—her ex-lover's new girlfriend—who was part of an American team attempting a similar climb. But to a discerning reader, there are other narratives: Wood's training with Outward Bound and early mentorship with other climbers and guides; her experience as a woman on a Himalayan expedition in the 1980s; her references to substance abuse, depression, and other mental health challenges; and, perhaps most of all, the whiplash of her experience upon returning from the climb. Front and center, though, are Wood's personal interactions: with her teammates, with her family, and, inevitably, with the mountain itself. She states it concisely in the introduction: "Everest taught me...the value of relationships: my relationship with myself, with some remarkable people, and with the world around me."

Despite the refreshing humility in Wood's writing, it's very clear she was a spectacularly strong and motivated climber, both mentally and physically. That strength is reflected in this book: Just as it takes a concentrated, almost obsessively single-minded effort to climb Everest, this tale firmly avoids wandering off scene. I deeply respect Sharon Wood, and would have liked a more substantial peek behind the curtain of her story—what it took to combat the sexism she faced, what challenges she met at other times in her life, what else she learned in her career as a climber and a guide—but I understand her decision to keep *Rising* focused on the climb, and I respect that, too.

– CHARLOTTE AUSTIN

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