

Finding Elevation: Fear and Courage on the World's Most Dangerous Mountain

Lisa Thompson

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Lisa Thompson's memoir *Finding Elevation* is an exhilarating and harrowing chronicle of mountain climbing. Compelled at first by "blind ambition," Thompson's climbs ranged from Seattle's Mount Rainier to treacherous K2, high above the Pakistan-China border.

Raised in a small Illinois town, Thompson had a stressful childhood and adolescence; though she was close to her father, he struggled with alcoholism, and her parents divorced. After college, Thompson worked in engineering. Following the end of her own troubled marriage, along with a breast cancer diagnosis and mastectomy, she began a more serious pursuit of mountain climbing as a personal quest and a reassertion of her survival.

Thompson describes each climbing venture in detail, contrasting the meticulous planning involved to the unparalleled natural beauty she encountered along the way. There are wonderful memories here, as of Nepalese children cheering Mount Manaslu climbers on, and harrowing ones, as with K2's terrifying tremors. The book also covers financial considerations, including taking time off from work, acquiring necessary yet expensive gear, and managing often-prohibitive travel costs.

Because mountain climbing is still dominated by men, Thompson reached the top of Mount Everest in 2016 as the only woman in her crew. While she did encounter occasional arrogance and "bro vibes," she also notes the team's general camaraderie—important because, beyond weather conditions and a climber's individual stamina, a faulty rope, ice, or falling rocks can result in serious accidents or death. Thompson's intense drive pushed her through fearful uncertainty and the imparted concerns of family and friends, like her sister's nervous plea: "don't die."

The second American woman to reach K2's "savage mountain" peak, Thompson now mentors and coaches other climbers. Conveying heartfelt emotions, suspense, and triumphs, her climber's memoir *Finding Elevation* is an upward journey of body and mind.

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