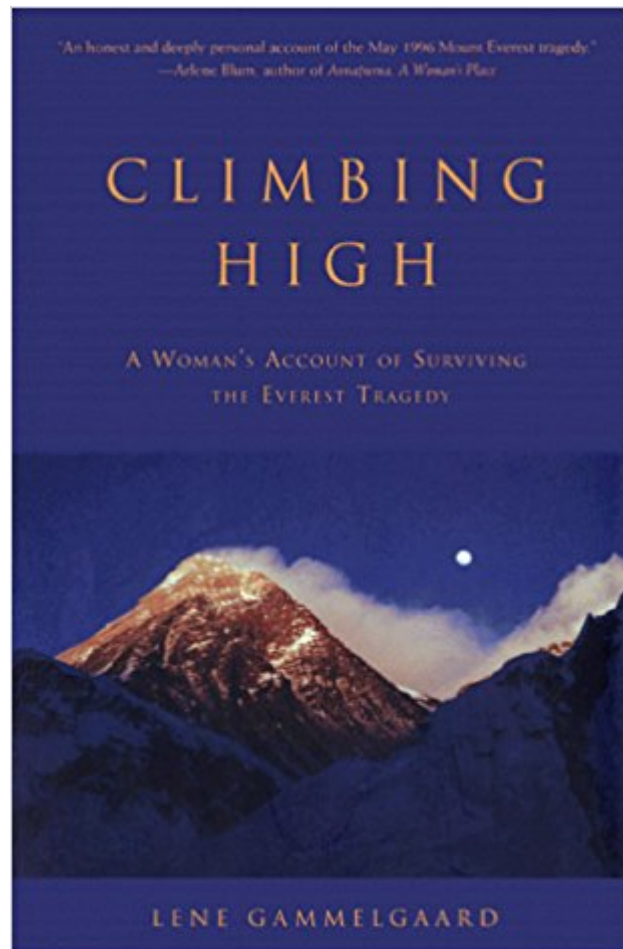




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# Climbing High: A Woman's Account Of Surviving The Everest Tragedy



## Synopsis

On May 10, 1996, the Danish author became the first Scandinavian woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest and, also, a survivor of the Sagarmatha Environmental Expedition that claimed eight lives. This account includes b&w photos of the climbers and the base camp, and a glossary of mountaineering terms.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In May 1996, Lene Gammelgaard became the first Scandinavian woman to reach the peak of Mount Everest. The next day she made history again by surviving the mountain's deadliest disaster. The catastrophic blizzard that killed eight climbers, including Gammelgaard's friend and expedition leader Scott Fischer, spurred controversy over the commercialization of Everest, and has been exhaustively chronicled in accounts such as Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*. Fortunately, *Climbing High* offers an original, insightful view of the tragedy and steers clear of the need to explain what went wrong: "You cannot expect anyone to help you ... up there. Your fate is in your own hands, your own two feet." Gammelgaard kept journals throughout the expedition, and her account stays true to this form: short, intense, and subjective entries on the pressures of financing the climb, the fierce physical and psychological challenges women face in extreme sports, and the tricky cluster of personalities that can make or break a summit bid. Yes, there are gripping moments, such as the desperate night she and seven others spent exposed in the storm above 20,000 feet, but Gammelgaard is at her best when providing insights into what drives people to risk--and sometimes

lose--their lives. --Svenja Soldovieri

Months before John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* conquered bestseller lists, Gammelgaard, a member of the 1996 Mountain Madness Mt. Everest expedition, wrote an account of the catastrophe that became a bestseller in Denmark and is at last available in English. Those who have followed the controversy surrounding the tragedy will welcome this even-handed version. A lawyer and psychotherapist, Gammelgaard intended to become the first Scandinavian woman to climb Everest. Her physical and mental training for a grueling ascent without oxygen (a publicity stunt that was later aborted) may have saved her life: she climbed quickly and reached the summit early. During the team's descent in the deadly snowstorm, she was also able to trade her full canister of oxygen for a weaker teammate's nearly empty one. Gammelgaard offers keen insights into the motivations and characters of the lead climbers and guides, and frankly discusses the "megalomania" that drove her to risk her life. Dismissing accusations that hers was a glamour expedition for wealthy amateurs, she emphasizes that her co-climbers were accomplished mountaineers and that the high price of admission paid for the best quality food, equipment and support team. Still, she has powerful regrets about the loss of life, confessing, "I just didn't know how high a price the Mother Goddess of the World would exact to show us humans the consequences of hubris." Photos. 7-city author tour. (July) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Mixed feelings on this book. I don't think she's as self-loathing or hubris-driven as many here relate, though she does rub it in a bit unsportsmanlike when she bests other climbers and could be more a team player. It's an interesting read and I think valid enough that this was an empowering experience for her in which she fully realized and unleashed her own strength. However...in reading others' accounts I was asking myself "Were these people actually on the mountain in the same experience?" Everyone else writes really gripping and vividly harrowing accounts of what was clearly a horrifying and hellish ordeal. Lene's account remains cheery and pleasant throughout taking an upbeat approach even in discussing the worst stages of the climb including deaths. I was thinking "Was she actually there?" Either she is that self-centered and being one of the top climbers on board didn't struggle as others did and just had no empathy for all the extreme suffering of her friends - OR - it's a kind of self-protective denial of being overwhelmed by it all and unable to process it so just simply shutting out the noir sides in her mind. She's a psychologist however, I imagine in time she'll figure it out. One thing that struck me as extreme was how callous she was in referring to the dying Yasuko Namba contemptfully as "that bundle." Yasuko was clearly culturally

alienated from everyone else and died a hardcore lingering suffering death alone. But I ended the book concluding that I really couldn't pass judgement because I'm not her and only she knows her ultimate intentions. People react very differently to trauma. I think maybe for her purposes the biggest tragedy was she and Anatoli didn't hook up and then he died a year later. She's probably still grappling with that as well. So ok overall I'd say a good read but not the ultimate source if you're looking for the real play-by-play of what went down when things went South on that mountain.

There have been many accounts written about the 1996 Everest tragedy. On May 10-11, eight people from three expeditions died when trapped by a storm in the Death Zone. They either disappeared on the mountain or were later discovered frozen to death. A ninth victim, Beck Weathers, survived after being left for dead when he was unable to move on his own. His walking into camp was nothing short of a miracle. Lene Gammelgaard was one of the hikers that made the summit on that fatal trip. She was part of Scott Fisher's Mountain Madness Expedition. Scott himself was one of the five people from the combined Adventure Consultants/Mountain Madness bid for the summit. Lene tells her story with candid prose. She was one of the climbers lost in the whiteout above Camp Four. Only a break in the storm for an instant saved any of them. The sky was clear long enough for one of the climbers to get a bearing from the stars. Lene was one of the climbers who staggered to safety and alerted people to others dying not far from camp. What really happened to trap the climbers is only known by the survivors. They lived the dreadful moments of being lost in a storm 8000 meters up. They knew the people who died and the horror of being able to do nothing to save them. Lene's account is straightforward and not focused on blame but focused on survival! I give the book four stars. Quoth the Raven

This is yet another perspective of the 1996 Everest tragedy by a survivor of the fiasco. Written in journal style, the author at times frames her thoughts in a staccato, stream of consciousness, rambling fashion, coupled with new age psycho babble. At other times, she intones in a pseudo profound way about Everest. The author comes off as a silly, vapid individual. It is interesting to note that while the author refers to Scott Fischer's expedition (of which she was a member) as an environmental one with a mission to clean up the debris on Everest left by expeditioners, nowhere does she state what it was that those on Scott Fischer's expedition were going to do to ameliorate the mess on the mountain. While she climbs up and down Everest, acclimatizing herself, she does not appear to be doing anything that remotely resembles conservation or clean up. Nor does she

indicate any affirmative interest in doing anything constructive to that end. She intones about the consequences of hubris up on the mountain. Yet, she, who had never before climbed Everest, was insisting that she would climb it without oxygen. She was even getting into arguments about it with Scott Fischer, who had the sense to tell her she would be climbing with oxygen. As it turned out, he was right. She could barely make it with oxygen. She should thank her lucky stars that he was so insistent that she climb with oxygen, otherwise she, too, would probably have died on Everest. She also incessantly refers to herself as a mountain climber, but she didn't even know what gear she should take, relying on the recommendations of others, and then criticizing their recommendations when they ran counter to her expectations. It is clear, no matter how she wants to dress up her reasons for climbing Everest, that it was just a trophy mountain for her. She hoped that climbing Everest would gild the path for her to some pseudo celebrity status in her country of Denmark. Her take on Anatoli Boukreev is much more sympathetic than was Jon Krakauer's in his book *Into Thin Air*. She saw Anatoli as an asset and misunderstood because of his taciturn demeanor. Anatoli comes off very well in this account. In fact, her take on him is much more sympathetic than her take on Scott Fischer, in whom she was apparently disappointed as an expedition leader. I must say if she acted the way she described in her book, then Scott Fischer, who was a true mountaineer, must have been heartily sick of her bravado about climbing Everest without oxygen. Her inflated sense of self is truly staggering at times. When she talks about hubris, she would do well to look no further than her own mirror. Notwithstanding all of this, her account has some merit. As an Everest junkie, I found parts of her journal to be of interest, which is why I rated it three stars, rather than two.

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