

“I SKIED DOWN MT. EVEREST.”

I tried alpine skiing for the first time when I was 14 years old—I was immediately hooked. So the day I graduated from college, I moved to Telluride, CO, to build a life centered on skiing. I completed my EMT training, worked on ski patrol, and was introduced to the thrill and beauty of backcountry skiing, where there are no chairlifts or lodges—just you and the mountain. **Nine years ago, after I climbed a mountain in India and found myself wishing I had my skis with me, I decided to perfect my skills so that I could ski anything, anywhere.** I met my husband, Rob, on a mountain in Siberia a year later, and together we've climbed and skied peaks all over the world.

Two years ago, we set a goal to ski the seven highest summits on the seven continents. Mt. Everest was the final and most challenging of them all. It took several days of traveling to Nepal and an 11-day trek just to reach base camp. We still had to climb the mountain itself, which has several different, complicated terrains. For example, the Khumbu Ice Fall is a maze of ice and deep crevasses that are crossed by ladder, so every step counts. **More so than on other mountains I've climbed, on Everest we also had to contend with the effects of extreme altitude and cold temperatures; at high altitudes, lack of oxygen sucks the warmth right out of you.** Carrying oxygen packs to stay alive was new for me, but 37 days after arriving at Mt. Everest Base Camp, we reached the summit.

Standing on the Southeast Ridge of Mt. Everest, looking over an 8,000-foot drop to Nepal on my right and a 9,000-foot drop to China on my left, I felt like I was on top of the



world. Below us, the snow was hard packed and wind-blown with firm ripples.

We planned to ski down 6,000 vertical feet, but our oxygen started running low, so I took off my skis to get us through a dangerous area more quickly. **When the weather took a turn for the worse, we had to stop and camp for the night. We'd been out for 15 hours—to continue would have been suicide.**

After a cold night with very little food and water, we faced the most extreme skiing of the trip. The Lhotse Face, a 45-degree slope, is much steeper than any commercial ski run. And that day, it was also a sheet of ice.

If one of us were to fall on this kind of terrain, we'd surely die. I was scared, but I couldn't let the fear take control. If I did, my balance would have been thrown off.

To focus my attention, I developed a mantra on the spot that I repeated for each turn: "Like your life depends on it. Turn." Eight hours later, we were down and greeted by our support team with cheers. Everyone was rooting for us—and we did it.

Looking up at the mountain, I was in awe at what I had just accomplished. **I was the first woman to descend Mt. Everest on skis—and I had completed my last of the seven summits!**

Today, Rob and I are still finding mountains to climb up and ski down, and our life is rich with the experience. They're not all as challenging as Mt. Everest, but each is thrilling, and every trip makes my heart sing.

■ **KIT DESLAURIERS, 37, TETON VILLAGE, WY**
as told to Emily Brower Auchard

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