

KEVIN BEIN  
1949-1988

Kevin Bein, known affectionately as the "Mayor of the Gunks," died at the age of 39 on August 1, 1988 in a rappelling accident on the Hörnli Ridge of the Matterhorn. He was climbing with his wife of twenty years, Barbara Devine, who was able to descend to a spot where she could be rescued by helicopter. Soon after, alerted by telephone and by word of mouth, 350 of Kevin's friends and family gathered from all parts of the country for an emotional memorial service at the Bacchus Restaurant in New Paltz, where Kevin had been the manager. Who was this man who in life and in death brought so many people together and who vanished from this earth so quickly, so unexpectedly, so incomprehensibly?

Obituaries tend to catalog the achievements of the deceased. Kevin, whose intellectual abilities would have allowed him to succeed in any of the conventionally revered occupations, chose climbing. There, his physical abilities allowed him to succeed as impressively as he might have in an academic or professional setting. He climbed at the highest standard of the day for twenty-five years and would have gone on for many more. But we did not gather on that dismal rainy night in New Paltz because Kevin was a good climber, or because he had kept up with the standards for longer than anyone else in the country. No one cited Kevin's hardest climbs, because Kevin's life was not measured by his achievements, substantial as they were for the climbing community, inconsequential as they would be for the conventional world.

When Kevin died, we lost more than a friend, partner, companion, teacher, motivator, cheerleader, coach, data bank, message board and crash pad. Kevin was all of these things, but he was more. He was the force that held together a vast international network of climbers with Shawangunk connections. Physically indestructible, relentlessly enthusiastic, perpetually youthful, continually optimistic, almost childishly innocent, he devoted himself not just to climbing but to climbers. Kevin made and lived in a little paradise, a world that was simple, pure, focused, joyful and fulfilling. All who met Kevin were invited to share that world, and sharing it, even briefly, made them stronger and more accomplished.

Kevin's friends and acquaintances have lost a center around which we all orbited, even if distantly. With his death, we got a little older, a little weaker, a little less confident and a lot more vulnerable. And so, publicly or privately, loudly or imperceptibly, we all cried. For Kevin, for Barbara, for ourselves, for paradise lost, for the end of an era in the Shawangunks. Incomprehensible as it seems, Kevin is dead, and we can only hope that the memory and meaning of his Camelot will long endure.

RICHARD GOLDSTONE