

pieces address equally the issues of why these people climb and the mysteries of personality, presenting these aspects as equally compelling and fascinating. Lou Reichardt's work in neurobiology is thought by some to be worthy of the Nobel Prize; Carlos Buhler's mother accompanies him to base camps in the Himalaya; Mugs Stumps started in two bowl games for Joe Paterno at Penn State. These kinds of humanizing details provide the reader with much more than the tick-list bio we've seen so often in the past. Besides, where else could you read of two separate people who met their spouses at the Yak and Yeti bar in Kathmandu?

John Sherman's profile of Mark Wilford includes a description of an epic on Nameless Tower with Greg Child that is as gripping as anything written in our long history of gripping epics. In his writing for *Climbing*, Sherman has devoted much energy to cultivating a "bad boy" persona, and would have us believe that he just crawled out from under a rock at some bouldering spot. While that may be true, don't be fooled—writing this good can only come from someone who spends long, hard hours at the craft.

Jon Krakauer's portrait of the Burgess twins adds a nice comic touch, but we miss his portrait of Fred Beckey. Likewise, we see Greg Child portrayed in one of four contributions by Waterman himself, but miss the thoughtful eye and sharp pen of Child's written work. One can only guess that these are among the selections missing because of conflicting rights and commitments to upcoming anthologies that Waterman acknowledges in his introduction.

In Ed Webster's touching portrait, Fritz Weissner is described as the embodiment of Elizabeth Knowlton's line, "To those men who are born for mountains, the struggle can never end, until their lives end." Webster, the only writer to also be profiled here, seems to embody those words himself. In fact, this is a collection in which all the writers might just as well be subjects, a collection in which the struggle to write has been hard fought and from which the writers have emerged successful.

Like climbing itself, writing about climbing is a labor of passion, not very well rewarded in the marketplace. Therefore it is all the more generous of these writers to have donated their royalties from this volume to help sponsor the American Alpine Club's annual literary award. *Cloud Dancers* marks the inaugural effort of the AAC Press to enlarge the scope of its work and to "reflect these changing times in an environment and a sport still mostly mysterious and misunderstood by the general public." This is an auspicious beginning.

DAVID STEVENSON

Beyond Risk: Conversations with Climbers. Nicholas O'Connell. Foreword by Greg Child. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1993. 300 pages. \$19.95.

Beyond Risk is a collection of seventeen interviews conducted by Nicholas O'Connell with "the world's most innovative and accomplished climbers." Climbers are an opinionated lot, but it seems unlikely that readers could have

anything more than minor quibbles with O'Connell's selection of subjects. The focus here is post World War II, though Cassin, somewhat pre-dates that. The organization of the book might be seen as somewhat circular, beginning with Messner and ending with Tomo Česen, the Himalayan standard bearer and heir apparent at the time the interviews were conducted. O'Connell moves fluidly from Himalayan explorers like Hillary, Bonington, Scott, and Voytek Kurtyka to all manner of rock climbers: Robbins, Harding, Jean-Claude Droyer, Wolfgang Güllich, Lynn Hill, Peter Croft. It is also to O'Connell's credit that fewer than half of the climbers here are native speakers of English. Thus, the collection is international in scope and extremely comprehensive in the larger historical picture it portrays. Like all good history, the picture is at the same time incredibly diverse and surprisingly unified.

Many of these climbers are writers themselves, well over half with books to their credit (Messner and Bonington being virtual publishing industries unto themselves). But even these familiar faces benefit from O'Connell's careful questioning and editing. I've read numerous books by Bonington and even spoken briefly with him, but O'Connell manages to get out of him what he rarely achieves in his own prose. Throughout this book these people are able to say the things that might be seen as unbecoming or self-aggrandizing in another context.

It is the obligation, I think of any good book about climbing, to address either explicitly or implicitly the issue of why we climb. We are invariably disappointed when the issue is ignored. O'Connell recognizes this and he attempts to draw from these climbers their innermost motivations. In their responses, however, we hear a little too often the circular "life is climbing, climbing is life" rationale. Kurt Diemberger even says that it's impossible to answer the question of why one climbs. "It is answered," he says, "by what you are doing." Having said that, he attempts an answer in spite of himself. In fact, there is a sense in which not just Diemberger's, but, all these dialogues, represent an effort to solve this riddle.

O'Connell employs a variety of questions to elicit responses that cut across generations and nationalities and come at us like voices scripted from a collective unconscious: Robbins: *Did you get a lot of pleasure out of it?* "Right off, I loved the physical reward of the body moving up rock."; Jean-Claude Droyer: "I liked the feeling. I liked moving on the rocks."; Wolfgang Güllich: *Why is it that you climb?* "It feels good to move on rock."

Perhaps the most precise answer comes from Jeff Lowe in answer to a question about fear: "I like the heightened concentration that comes from that slight tension between fear and control and just feathering that edge and making sure you're on the safe side of it."

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its historical continuity. Česen cites Bonatti, Buhl, and Cassin as strong influences; Croft cites Bonington as an early hero and Bonatti above all others; Jean-Claude Droyer the father of modern free climbing in France, also cites Bonatti. Bonatti himself cites Cassin as an influence but also expresses admiration for those who followed him,

Messner and Scott. Likewise, Robbins notes that Croft, in addition to his mastery of climbing has “a character that is head and shoulders above a lot of petulance and nay-saying and faultfinding that even I’m involved in.”

O’Connell does a superb job of introducing each climber in a two or three page bio and his introduction to the book as a whole provides a concise and accurate history of modern climbing. Since the book’s completion Lynn Hill has freed the Nose, and Česen’s ascent of the south face of Lhotse has become highly controversial. Of the many changes since then, none so affected me as the tragic death of Wolfgang Güllich in an auto accident. Güllich, to whom the book is dedicated, seems the freshest voice. One emerges from reading the interview wanting to meet him, then remembering he’s gone, glad to have his words preserved here so eloquently.

DAVID STEVENSON

Mixed Emotions. Greg Child. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1993. 256 pages. \$14.95 (paper).

Stories off the Wall. John Roskelley. The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1993. Color and black-and-white photographs. 223 pages, \$22.95.

Together these books provide a generous sampling of extreme climbing, principally Himalayan, in the past two decades. Child and Roskelley share a taste for small expeditions to uncharted places. Hard routes on high peaks are their specialty. Roskelley is particularly dismissive of Everest mob scenes and tourists dragged through storms up Denali. Their books dramatize the frontiers of individual climbing style in the last two decades—especially in the Himalaya, where the familiar hazards of weather and altitude are multiplied by technical difficulty.

Child is much more the writer, and *Mixed Emotions* is mixed in content: autobiography, portraits of other climbers, reflections, climbs (a few of which were recounted in different form in Child’s earlier *Thin Air*). I enjoyed the portraits the most; they are the work of a thoughtful journalist, revealing even when tackling such familiar icons as Doug Scott and Don Whillans. Child’s own attitudes emerge unobtrusively but clearly in his description of the Polish high-altitude climber, Voytek Kurtyka. Kurtyka seems heroic not principally for his big-peak achievements, but for his attitude toward them. “The event of an alpine-style ascent has a very deep, ethical reason,” Kurtyka says. Hence his estrangement from his partner Jerzy Kukuczka, who went on to his 14th 8000-meter summit and, soon thereafter, death on Lhotse. Kurtyka has written: “If there is such a thing as spiritual materialism it is displayed in the urge to possess mountains rather than to unravel and accept their mysteries.” Child’s admiration of such views may be inferred from his account of a climb to a high Hindu shrine: “it isn’t what you find at the end but what you learn along the way.”