

MICAH DASH 1977–2009

In late spring 2009, Micah Dash, a 32-year old professional climber, died in a massive avalanche while climbing the east face of Mt. Edgar (6,618m), on the Gongga Shan massif, located in western Sichuan Province, China. The above is cold fact, like an alpine colossus in entropy, like a corpse buried in rock and snow. It reveals little of the vitality and beauty of the man recently departed. But mountains are indifferent, unconcerned with your safety or CV, and they extend safe passage with one hand and obliteration with the other. The paradox of feeling intensely alive when so close to ruin emerges from this polarity of life and death. Micah led a resolute life, focused on being the best climber his body and mind could produce. In his last blog he wrote of his exercise regimen, stating, “...this kind of training won’t necessarily make you a better climber, you need to climb to do that, but what it will do is make you hard to kill in the alpine.”



Micah Dash in 2008. *Dean Fidelman*

You remember your brushes with fate; this is important since those close calls impart wisdom—until they’re so close that only those left behind learn the lesson. Micah got the chop. He’d say it about me. It’s not so much gallows humor, the universal relief valve, as it is the simple truth, a cruel truth that confirms the loss of a cherished person. I remember Micah always being thankful for what he created in the last decade of his life, especially the last few years when he finally earned what was to him the most intoxicating commodity: recognition. He was making a good living being a badass dude, recounting tales to inspired audiences, and he lived in larger shoes than he wore. But who’s perfect? He was petty, insecure, loud, and cheap, yet he had a heart of gold. His way out was to go up, from being whacked out desperately on hard drugs to gaining independence, from dropout to University of Colorado grad, from Free Rider to Nameless Tower.

Micah signed off his blog posts with the word “Always,” and the irony stings and embarrasses me as I think, “Hmm, not really.” But there is an undying embodiment of the word. I ponder the law of conservation of energy that states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, that it remains the same in a closed system—say, our climbing community. I wonder about the cumulative power of Micah’s prolific crunching of baby carrots, cabbage salad, and his abs; about his manic attempts at success on his current project, be it a redpoint of a single-pitch finger flayer or an alpine style first ascent in a distant range; about the mounting wattage of his obsessive, nervous twitching, never ceasing mind, and globe trotting spirit. If energy is only transformed from one state to another, then all the potential he possessed at the time of impact was unleashed and broadcast into the living world to be tuned in and absorbed by us.

Micah, my brother, you were absolutely killing it in your final months and I revel in the knowledge that you were experiencing the deepest love, boldest climbs, and most profound career success. We miss you deeply: the honesty of your self doubt, the ecstatic triumph of your victories, your incessant hunting and gathering of calories, the rising staccato of your laughter, how with a nose like a trumpet you brought us to tears with your hilarious tunes of self-deprecation and satire. The empathy you felt when someone got smacked down informed us that you’d been sharply struck yourself and felt the ache. And especially your rise from a runty outsider from the Mojave Desert to the center of a band of loyal, loving rock monkeys who cherished you entirely, your every vulnerable shortcoming and noble strength. Your whole being equaled so much more than simply the sum of your parts. We long to hear your shrill

astonishment again, “Oh my god, I did it, I fucking sent it,” or your rigid dismissals, “That’s not cool, that’s just not cool at all dude.” And of course we will never forget your life’s tag line, the acknowledgement of insatiability in every aspect of your life: “Are you going to eat that?”

We will Micah. We will consume and assimilate the remainder of your existence, not mere crumbs but a massive heartfelt serving of humanity, of rising up, of working hard, of carrying on to the last dying breath. And even though you may have been killed doing what you loved, at least you don’t have to do anymore of the things you hated. Know that I will live strongly and follow your example of being more fearful of not living than of dying, for the latter is a certainty and the former is a call to action. *Carpe Micah.*

TIMMY O’NEILL

CHARLES SNEAD HOUSTON 1913–2009

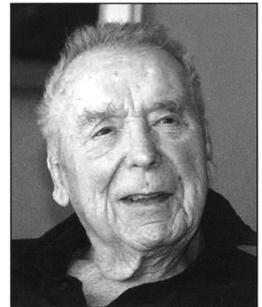
The wise old guru and mentor for so many of us died peacefully in his Vermont home on September 27. He was 96, the last of the Harvard Mountaineering Club Five, with Terris Moore, H. Adams Carter, Bradford Washburn, and Robert Bates.

Charlie was scarcely 40 when he swore off mountaineering, but he packed a lot of it into the preceding two decades. During his Harvard undergrad years, first ascents of mounts Crillon and Foraker were among the crown jewels. While a supposedly serious medical student at Columbia, he conceived what was to be the first ascent of Nanda Devi in 1936, the highest mountain climbed until the French ascent of Annapurna 14 years later. He managed to enlist three seasoned Brits, Bill Tillman, Noel Odell, and Graham Brown, to join his young team. Two years later Charlie and Bob Bates put together an AAC-sponsored reconnaissance of K2. They might have reconnoissanced themselves to the top had they not run out of matches.

After Nepal opened its doors to Westerners, in 1950 Charlie and his father Oscar, Andy Bakewell, Betsy Cowles, and Bill Tillman pioneered a new approach to Everest. Charlie and Tillman became the first Westerners to view its infamous Icefall.

Fifteen years after their first K2 trip, Charlie and Bob Bates were back in the Baltoro with a team of young hard men. The 1953 K2 expedition is, like Shackleton’s voyage of the Endurance, one of those magnificent failures that provoke us all to reexamine our definition of success. The team was high on the mountain positioned for a summit attempt when the weather packed in, and Art Gilkey developed what Charlie diagnosed as thrombophlebitis. For him and his teammates, there was no choice but to try to lower Art down the mountain even though they figured the odds of succeeding were about zilch and that their own chances of getting down alive would be much diminished. That assumption was validated when one of the team fell, pulling off a sequence of four others in entangling ropes. It was only Pete Schoening’s ice-ax belay of Gilkey’s makeshift litter that kept all seven from hurtling thousands of feet to their deaths. Charlie, in his later years, came to call this iconic camaraderie of that team the “Brotherhood of the Rope,” used as the title of both a film he put together in his 90s about the two K2 expeditions and of his biography by Bernadette McDonald.

Even before K2 in 1953, Charlie’s affair with thin air was morphing into its next incarnation, that of high-altitude research. Though Charlie had no formal training, here too he



Charles Houston. *Anne-Marie W. Littenberg*