

UNITED STATES

CORNICE COLLAPSE, FALL ON SNOW, EXCEEDING ABILITIES, CLIMBING UNROPED

Alaska, Palmer, Knik Valley

In early April of 1994, Martin Martinez' climbing partner vanished after a cornice gave way, resulting in a long plunge down the side of a deep couloir in the Knik Valley, near Palmer.

Martinez said he didn't see her fall. He crawled out onto the snow and called her name. There was no response, and finally Martinez trudged home, convinced his partner was dead. But that night, he said, he dreamed she was standing at the foot of his bed and he knew he had to go back.

"I wasn't sure if she was dead, and I couldn't deal with myself. I couldn't leave her there to die a slow death. She's like (*sic*) my climbing partner."

So on Thursday morning, the 33-year-old tree seller called Dave Botich of Mountain Helicopters and persuaded him to help. Botich said Martinez didn't have much money, but he said he could pay with gold nuggets.

"I told him it's going to be a little costly," he said. Botich charges \$325 an hour for flying time and \$75 per hour on the ground. He finally settled on \$600 for a day's work. When they took off, both men were sure they would find Martinez' partner dead at the base of the slope. But as they circled near the top of the peak, they spotted her less than 40 feet below the peak. She had climbed up the steep couloir, but couldn't reach the last part—a sheer, vertical cliff, and had burrowed into the snow.

Neither was prepared to do a rescue, so they flew back to Martinez' home in the Butte. Botich said he thought they should get some help. But everybody they called—the Alaska State Troopers, a mountain rescue group and the military—refused to help.

So the two decided to do it themselves. Martinez got some gear, recruited longtime climbing buddy Bob Crawford, and the three took off.

Botich said he dropped the two off on a ridge about 1,000 feet below where she was, then flew to a spot where he could land. The two men hiked up to the top. When they arrived, Martinez said, a couple of ravens were perched nearby and an eagle was circling overhead. Just below was his eager and uninjured partner.

Martinez said he rappelled down and wrapped some line around her, and then had Crawford pull her up.

"When I saw the two of them, the dog running around wagging its tail, I was totally amazed," Botich said. "No human being would have ever survived the fall."

Martinez said he figures Lupine was following the scent of some sheep when the cornice broke off. (Source: from an article by S. J. Komarnitsky written for the *Anchor-age Daily News*)

(Editor's Note: Thanks to Daniel Osborne of College, AK, for sending this in. The important message is that climbers should be willing to pay for their own rescue!)