

He derived a great deal of pleasure from intellectual pursuits. On a warm summer day you could find him on the summit of Gothics for hours, studying *The Advance Opinions of the Supreme Court* (because he wanted to stay current for his Constitutional Law classes) and *The Oxford Book of English Verse* “since Gothics is kind of a poem of rock and trees and light and air, and it’s rather nice to read a poem while you’re sitting on one.”

Apart from mountaineering and skiing, Rocky loved classical music, *The New York Times*, and peanut butter.

Rocky is survived by his wife, Heidi; two children from a previous marriage, Sandra and Winthrop; three grandchildren; and scores of friends. Every one of them misses him every day.

ROBERT A. FORREST, AAC

PETER K. SCHOENING 1927-2004

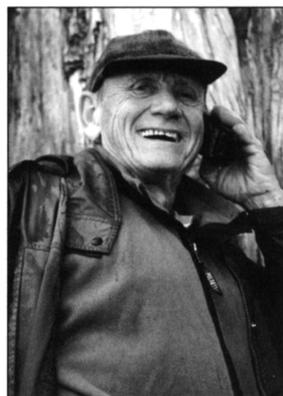
Pete Schoening died at his home on Lake Washington shortly after dawn. As the day lightened, a lone bald eagle made one slow circle at eye level just outside the window, then rose into the morning sky. It was the 51st anniversary of Pete and Mell’s wedding day.

Pete’s lifelong passion for mountains never waned even as his physical capacity dwindled during his seven-year journey with multiple myeloma. To many of us who had the opportunity to climb with Pete in his heyday, he was the finest mountaineer of our time. His spirit continues to fill the empty space where once we walked and talked and climbed together.

Most of the obituaries appearing around the world focused on the moment that gave birth to the Pete legend—“the belay.” It took place on K2 in 1953. High on the mountain, within striking distance of the summit, Art Gilkey became critically ill. With the odds stacked against them, the team made the decision to try to get him down in horrendous conditions. Pete had anchored the makeshift litter with a boot ax belay, the pick braced behind an outcrop of rock. One member of the team slipped. As ropes entangled, one by one, four others were plucked from their perches on the steep snow. Somehow the ropes of the falling climbers became entangled with the litter. Their fall to certain death was arrested by Schoening’s belay. The feat seems superhuman. A legend was born. The ax itself is one of the great artifacts of mountaineering history. Pete lived with this bit of inescapable notoriety with the same unassuming modesty that pervaded all aspects of his life.

That life played out in the Pacific Northwest. He graduated from Roosevelt High School in Seattle and joined the Navy near the end of World War II. He returned home to obtain a degree in chemical engineering at the University of Washington, where he taught mountaineering classes. Both the American Alpine Club and the Seattle Mountain Rescue Council felt the creative touch of his boundless energy and enthusiasm.

Pete began his climbing in the toughest terrain in the lower 48 states, the “green hell” of the North Cascades. He thrived on bushwhacking into places no one had been before and most would not want to go. He made many first ascents, not so much collecting new routes as new adventures. Pete’s invitation to become the youngest member of the 1953 expedition to K2



Pete Schoening. Bill Sumner

followed pioneering climbs of Mt. Saugstad in the Bella Coola range of British Columbia in 1951 and of Mount Augusta and on King Peak in the Yukon the following year.

In 1958 Pete and Andy Kauffman reached the summit of Gasherbrum I (Hidden Peak), 26,470 feet, the only American first ascent of an 8,000 meter mountain. Combining superb technique and incredible strength with a ferocious determination, he stormed up the mountain, ignoring pleas of his teammates to save his strength for the final push. On summit day, he punched a trail through deep snow for 2½ miles, all above 24,000 feet, using food box lids impaled to his crampons as makeshift snowshoes.

The following year Pete, Willi Unsoeld, and Dick Pownall completed a one-day “enchainment” of Teewinot, Mt. Owen, and the Grand, unintended preparation for a three-day ascent of McKinley in 1960 with the Whittaker twins and John Day (and a resulting rescue that upstaged the climb itself).

In December 1966 Pete, Barry Corbet, Bill Long, and John Evans were the first to stand upon the highest point on the Antarctic continent, the summit of 16,880-foot Mt. Vinson. In 1974 Pete led the first AAC-sponsored climbing exchange to the Pamirs and was among those summiting 23,406-foot Peak Lenin. In 1985 he was part of the first joint Chinese-American Expedition to a remote mountain in the Kun Lun Range named Ulugh Muztagh. The expedition put five Chinese climbers on top of this frigid peak. Pete passed on an opportunity for the summit to instead evacuate two climbers who had experienced an accelerated descent down hard ice in the moonlight after their summit moment. Over the next few years Pete returned to China three more times to attempt peaks in the Kangkarpo Range between Tibet and Yunnan.

Meanwhile, here at home Pete was steadily picking off the highest points in each of the 50 states, learning new techniques of skill and diplomacy in order to negotiate cornfields, backyards, and irate domestic wildlife. He completed this odyssey in Wyoming in 1997. About the same time Pete, along with various friends and relations, was quietly ticking off some other high points—Aconcagua, Kilimanjaro, and Elbrus. That left only one of the seven continental tops to tease his fantasy. In 1996 at age 68 he and his nephew, Klev Schoening, headed for Everest, signing up with Scott Fischer’s party. Pete was climbing as strongly as any of the young ones, but his famed snoring was now interfering more with his own sleep than that of others. He placed a satellite phone call to his friend Hornbein for some medical advice, then opted out of heading back up for the final push out of concern that if he were to have problems, he’d be putting others at risk.

Mountains were not the only passion in Pete’s life. He met Mary Lou (Mell) Deuter in the late ’40s. Their courtship was characterized by an anonymous spouse as brief encounters of the infrequent kind, taking place on those rare occasions when the Northwest’s notoriously foul weather was more than even Pete could abide. Pete and Mell became engaged before he left for K2, and married when he returned. They built two houses and raised six kids. Pete took on a failing business and transformed it into a leading producer of corrosion-resistant fiberglass grating for factory flooring and other uses. He brought the same energy, integrity, and caring to his role as president of Chemgrate as to everything else he undertook, adding yet another notch to his status as legend.

Then there’s Big Red, an overweight Schwinn one-speed bike with coaster brakes. Pete believed in one bike for all venues. He took to riding in the Seattle-to-Portland bike event each summer. Just imagine seeing this balding elder standing on his pedals cranking up a mile-long hill. In the beginning he did this 200 mile ride in two days but when this challenge paled, he and

Big Red just did it in one, which did little to mute his status as legend.

Pete's passion for his mountain world never waned even as his incomparable physical capacity dwindled. "Tuesdays with Pete" became precious "walks and talks" with friends, continuing until a couple weeks before his death.

Pete left behind a boundless pot of memories in the minds and hearts of those whose lives he touched. He was a superb mountaineer (he'd squirm if he read this). But his transcendent greatness was that radiant spirit with which some of us were privileged to warm our lives. He had the strength of a bull and the heart of a boy scout. Pete always did more than his share of the work and took less than his share of the credit. He worried about others and not about himself. His friends could count on him, and he never failed.

A few miles east of Seattle and almost 4,000 feet above the Interstate you can see an insignificant rocky pyramid on the skyline. His friends named it for Pete—Putrid Pete's Peak, *aka* P-Cubed. Pete liked having this bump named (irreverently) after him. Atop P-Cubed is a small, waterproof box. Inside the box is a book of poetry by Gary Snyder, *Turtle Island*. One poem in particular made Pete beam with delight:

Why Log Truck Drivers Rise Earlier Than Students of Zen

*In the high seat, before-dawn dark,
Polished hubs gleam
And the shiny diesel stack
Warms and flutters
Up the Tyler Road grade
To the logging on Poorman creek.
Thirty miles of dust.*

There is no other life.

NICK CLINCH AND TOM HORNBEIN, AAC

NECROLOGY

James Angell
Wilford Bucher
Peter Cooley
James Corbet
J. Edwards
William Elfendahl
Henry Everding
David Green

Morgan Harris
Pierre Juillerat
Reese Martin
W. V. Matthews
Arne Naess
Francis Olding
Brian Reynolds
Dorothy Rich

David Robertson
Sayre Rodman
Peter Schoening
William Siri
Jack Smith
Johnny Soderstrom
John Woodworth