



## Climbing High: A Woman's Account of Surviving the Everest Tragedy

By Lene Gammelgaard, Press Seal

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On May 10, 1996, Lene Gammelgaard became the first Scandinavian woman to reach the summit of Mount Everest. But a raging storm and human error conspired to turn triumph into catastrophe. Eight of her team's climbers, including its renowned leader Scott Fischer, perished in a tragedy that would make headlines around the world. In her riveting account, Gammelgaard takes us from her weeks of determined training to the exhilaration of arriving in Nepal to the arduous climb and deadly storm that forced her and her fellow climbers to huddle throughout the night, hoping to stay alive. Gammelgaard also writes movingly of Everest's awesome beauty; of the passion and commitment required to face the daunting challenge of climbing to high altitudes; and of the complex personal relationships forged in the pursuit of such dangerous ventures. Arlene Blum, author of the classic account of women and mountaineering, *Annapurna: A Woman's Place*, calls *Climbing High* "an honest and deeply personal account."

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

In May 1996, Lene Gammelgaard became the first Scandinavian woman to reach the peak of Mount Everest. The next day she made history again by surviving the mountain's deadliest disaster. The catastrophic blizzard that killed eight climbers, including Gammelgaard's friend and expedition leader Scott Fischer, spurred controversy over the commercialization of Everest, and has been exhaustively chronicled in accounts such as Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*.

Fortunately, *Climbing High* offers an original, insightful view of the tragedy and steers clear of the need to explain what went wrong: "You cannot expect anyone to help you ... up there. Your fate is in your own hands, your own two feet." Gammelgaard kept journals throughout the expedition, and her account stays true to this form: short, intense, and subjective entries on the pressures of financing the climb, the fierce physical and psychological challenges women face in extreme sports, and the tricky cluster of personalities that can make or break a summit bid. Yes, there are gripping moments, such as the desperate night she and seven others spent exposed in the storm above 20,000 feet, but Gammelgaard is at her best when providing insights into what drives people to risk--and sometimes lose--their lives. --*Svenja Soldovieri*

#### From Publishers Weekly

Months before John Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* conquered bestseller lists, Gammelgaard, a member of the 1996 Mountain Madness Mt. Everest expedition, wrote an account of the catastrophe that became a bestseller in Denmark and is at last available in English. Those who have followed the controversy surrounding the tragedy will welcome this even-handed version. A lawyer and psychotherapist, Gammelgaard intended to become the first Scandinavian woman to climb Everest. Her physical and mental training for a grueling ascent without oxygen (a publicity stunt that was later aborted) may have saved her life: she climbed quickly and reached the summit early. During the team's descent in the deadly snowstorm, she was also able to trade her full canister of oxygen for a weaker teammate's nearly empty one. Gammelgaard offers keen insights into the motivations and characters of the lead climbers and guides, and frankly discusses the "megalomania" that drove her to risk her life. Dismissing accusations that hers was a glamour expedition for wealthy amateurs, she emphasizes that her co-climbers were accomplished mountaineers and that the high price of admission paid for the best quality food, equipment and support team. Still, she has powerful regrets about the loss of life, confessing, "I just didn't know how high a price the Mother Goddess of the World would exact to show us humans the consequences of hubris." Photos. 7-city author tour. (July)

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#### From Library Journal

The events of May 1996 put Mt. Everest back in bold headlines. The attention of a jaded public was recaptured by the deaths of eight people, including two of the world's foremost climbers, and the subsequent accusations that Everest had become a "trophy" peak available to the highest bidder. The first book to emerge from this tragedy was Jon Krakauer's superb *Into Thin Air* (LJ 4/1/97), but it was only a matter of time before other personal accounts began to appear. Breashears, an accomplished cinematographer, was approached by the IMAX Corporation with the incredible assignment to film an ascent of Everest. Anyone who has seen the finished product knows that Breashears produced an outstanding film, but his account of its making during Everest's deadliest climbing season ever is equally breathtaking. In a calm, almost detached manner, he describes the first stirrings of unease he felt when he saw the climbers, many of them woefully inexperienced, getting ready to make the ascent. His story reflects little of the heroism he and his crew

showed as they shared their resources with other groups that found themselves in serious difficulty. His account of the tragedy is viewed through the eye of a cinematographer, riveting in its simplicity. Dickinson, another filmmaker, was there as part of a British team; right up front, he tells readers that he is not an expert climber. His account is the one that will appeal to readers who come no closer to climbing Everest than reading a book. His skill with words and his obviously deep respect for his mission adds a personal touch that will give readers a vicarious thrill. Gammelgaard's book appeared first in her native Denmark. She presents her information almost in the form of a diary, using brief paragraphs and intensely personal observations. There is a feminist/ ethnocentric slant to her writing; many of her comments reflect her being a woman and a Dane in a sport dominated largely by men and Americans. She was also part of the ill-fated Scott Fischer team that many felt had "bought" their way to Everest. She describes her personal feelings about the enigmatic Fischer, including the traits that eventually led to his death. Beyond Krakauer's title, Dickinson's book would be the best choice, followed by Breashears's and Gammelgaard's. All three are well written and will give readers a sense of what it feels like to punish one's body to an unbelievable degree for the thrill of standing on top of the world. [Breashears's book was previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 1/99.]AJoseph L. Carlson, Lompoc, C.  
-AJoseph L. Carlson, Lompoc, CA  
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#### **Kevin Lemon:**

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