



CLIMB

A Tale of Two Writers

Meet Pete Takeda and Majka Burhardt

By Lizzy Scully

Both Boulder-based writer/climbers Pete Takeda and Majka Burhardt married their love of climbing and travel with their passion for writing. Last year Takeda published his award-winning *An Eye At The Top Of The World*, and this February Burhardt published *Vertical Ethiopia: Climbing Toward Possibility in the Horn of Africa*. Has success followed the prestige of being a published writer? I recently sat down with these two engaging authors to find out.

“Writing is just like climbing,” Takeda says. “If you burn for it, you’ll do it. If you entertain a notion of doing it for any other reason, chances are it will be very disappointing.”

“Don’t do it! Run far away,” adds Burhardt with a hearty laugh.

Pushing the Boundaries

I first met Pete Takeda, 43, on the pages of *Rock & Ice* magazine. One of my writing role models, his scrappy tales of the Yosemite dirt bag existence coupled with his incongruously elegant prose inspired my desire to pursue a career in journalism (and climbing as a lifestyle). In conversation or written word, Takeda enthusiastically delves into anything and everything that pushes the boundaries of word play and provocative thought. A cynical romantic, he believes, “everyone in their lifetime can have everything they ever dreamed of and everything they ever desired, but they just can’t have it all at the same time.”

In the early chapters of *An Eye At The Top Of The World*, he describes spending months tent-bound, waiting out storms and other hazards, including the loss of his marriage, while trying (and ultimately failing) to get up the still un-climbed central summit of 6,600-meter Meru in the Garhwal-Himalaya Region of India.

“For me,” he writes, “the ability to understand the price of passion touches on every other issue in life. Some dreams need to be followed to the end, and I value the understanding that only comes after trying hard. So were those four years in the Garhwal worth it? More than I could have dreamed, actually. Just not in the way I expected.”

Instead of summit success, Takeda’s trips led him on a quest to research and write the history of one of climbing’s urban legends. His captivating book follows the true story of the climbers and governments involved in the CIA’s attempt to put a nuclear-powered spy device on India’s 7,817-meter Nanda Devi in order to spy on China’s nuclear test sites and troop movement.

“Life is about positioning yourself,” says Takeda. “The greatest things we can hope to create are limited by our own aspirations. The best things in life come out of left field—things we can’t imagine.” Takeda is currently negotiating a contract to turn the book into a feature film and is researching another book.



The author (far right) with Majka Burhardt and Pete Takeda at a signing for Burhardt’s new book.

A Kindred Spirit

Majka Burhardt came into my life in a whirlwind of action and wild curly hair a decade ago. She organized kick-ball contests in Estes Park where we both lived, and the parties she threw at the straw-bail home she built were legendary. We found ourselves to be kindred spirits, obsessively making our way up the granite walls of Rocky Mountain National Park (sometimes together), and often avidly pursuing highly energized and intellectual deliberations along the way.

Since I’ve known her, this hyper-kinetic, 31-year-old has earned her master’s degree in journalism, and has become a successful freelance writer and senior contributing editor for *Climbing* magazine. She’s also only the fourth woman to become an AMGA-certified rock guide, a monumental accomplishment. Currently, the recent publication of *Vertical Ethiopia* has led to a prominent 20-state book and speaking tour.

“I’m trying to be very efficient with my time so that I can say yes to as many people as possible, and I’m trying not to let my friends know so they won’t call me a workaholic!” she says with a laugh, as Takeda rolls his eyes. It’s hard to stop the ball rolling though; her events have become “huge” collaborative efforts.

“It’s becoming something that a lot of different communities are rallying around,” she says. The World Affairs Council and the Pacific Science Center brought her presentation to the kickoff event of the Seattle’s “Lucy Tour”—Ethiopia’s 3.2-million-year old hominid fossil Lucy is on a world tour. Seattle’s large Ethiopian population also recently began rallying around the event.

Vertical Ethiopia has also helped Burhardt realize one of her dreams. She wanted climbing to “give back to her life in concrete ways” and make what she was doing have a wider purpose. She found that she could tell readers why Ethiopia was “not just about famine, drought and poverty.” And that discovery led to her successfully merging “something I love—writing, climbing and travel—with something I’m really passionate about—international awareness,” she says.

As she writes in her book, “... there is more to climbing than mere ascent. It enables you to interact with a landscape at an intimate level. It requires immersion into the natural world and all her most sacred spaces. And when the world opens up on a vertical plane, anything seems possible.”

Lizzy Scully lives and writes from her small house on the edge of Hall Ranch in Lyons.

For more on Pete Takeda and his writing, visit www.petetakeda.com.
For more on Majka Burhardt and her adventures, visit www.majkaburhardt.com.