



You Can't See the Top From That Far Down!

If you've ever watched mountain climbing documentaries, you know they always start from a place called base camp. A base camp is a staging area where people make final preparations for their climb, assembling their supplies, equipment, team and guides. We're all like that, in a way. We all have dreams for our lives, and from our respective base camps we get ready to face the challenges of the climb it will take to fulfill them. But there was a time in my life when base camp was nothing but a pipe dream. Reaching a peak or summit—fulfilling a dream—was out of the question.

I was 22 and very likely to die young. In fact, I'd been actively throwing my life away for the past four years. But it all came crashing down when I woke up in a dingy hospital room after a three-month binge on cocaine and Quaaludes. The doctors and nurses rushed in and out of the room and talked in hushed tones. A thin curtain was drawn between two small beds, and sounds of

coughing and moaning drifted in from just down the hallway. The whole place smelled of death and illness mixed with the pungent sting of antiseptic. I was in the far bed, a young washed-out junky. I couldn't remember the last time I wasn't drunk, high or both. Yet the medical personnel kept checking my vital signs, running tests and trying to find a diagnosis. In place of the needle-scared "tracks" up and down my arms were bandages, tape and tubes—trying to pump some degree of health back into my wasted body.

When my system was at last free of illegal pharmaceuticals, I was still in excruciating pain with stomach cramps that seemed to turn my whole body inside out. It could have been anything—bad drugs, dirty needles, or any number of the hazards common to an addict. Truthfully, the nurses and doctors probably wondered if I was worth all the trouble. But they persevered; maybe just because it was a puzzle they couldn't solve. All the tests they could think of showed nothing more was physically wrong with me, but the pain persisted relentlessly.

As I lay in that small sweat-soaked bed all day with no visitors, friends, or family, I realized I was alone—truly alone. I was also angry, frustrated, and without even the dimmest hope for the future.

How did I get here? How could I have fallen so low so fast? As if to answer my own question, wretched memories of the last four years began to flood my brain. Horrible pictures. It was like watching a movie of my past, ugly scenes of violence—every blow, kick, cut or slap I ever delivered, received or watched; and drugs—the deals, money, needles, and highs, followed immediately by obsessive plans for the next buzz. There was sex, betrayal and every other vile act you probably can't imagine. If there was such a thing

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as a living hell, I was trapped in it. Everything I said I'd never do, I did; every moral, every standard I ever had, I'd broken. Every loyalty to friend or family, betrayed.

Finally, I realized what being completely alone really meant. There was no one to look to, lean on, or to ask for help, comfort or direction. It was my own doing, to be sure, but still my heart, my life, and my future were empty and I desperately needed a friend. I needed someone, anyone, to help me with life because I had totally ruined mine so far.

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My story is not so different from a million other addicts, but something amazing happened that Wednesday in my drab gray little hospital room. I remembered hearing about God when I was younger. My family had not been churchgoers but I had a friend who went. When I spent the night with him I had to go to church with his family. There I heard about God's love, power and forgiveness. But was I beyond help? Could, would, just maybe... He might pull me out of the agony I was in? So I turned to the one Person I thought I could trust. My only hope was the only One who could reach down that low and pull me up. That day I entered into a partnership with God. I figured what could it hurt? He couldn't do any worse than I had. Little did I know I was in for the climb of my life!

Those first few weeks and months out of the hospital, I was just happy to be alive and really had no idea of what I was getting into. I certainly wasn't going to get dressed up, sit on a church pew and sing 200-year-old songs. But I was serious about the God thing. Evidently He was serious too, because it wasn't long before I realized

that if God was going to be my Partner I had better make plans—big plans. And they had nothing to do with pews and hymns.

My life changed so quickly it was like a blur. I was out of the hospital and off drugs for good. I can't explain it or give you a simple recipe for success; I just wanted to have a new life. For the first time I was actually making progress—instead of descending I was ascending. I started attending a church and met friends that cared for me, just because, not for what I could give. I got a job and started showing up to work every day. It's amazing how you can keep a job if you show up each day. I started feeling good about me, my future, and for the first time I wasn't lonely or angry. I no longer felt empty or like a loser. My destiny seemed to be improving daily. I started to feel my life had a purpose for the first time, like my Partner wanted me to prepare for a life of helping others. I had been through a lot and I began to see how it could be used for good. I started dating Christian girls, making plans, thinking of marriage, and looking forward to what the future held. That's about the time groups began to ask me to speak and tell my story. People asked me to help them with wayward family members and friends. I actually saw people trapped in addictive lifestyles being freed. These new experiences gave me a reason to get out of bed in the morning.

I don't even remember blasting past base camp, but boy, was I ever climbing for the first time in my life. Amazingly, even better things were in store for me. Imagine, a hopeless case like me actually seeing great things happen. I found new friends, help, a vision for the future and a hope I had never experienced before.

As I got stronger, I began to give back, to help others get off drugs, abandon destructive behaviors and step out of defeated

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lifestyles. All the while my future began to look brighter and better. It was as if once I got out of the ditch, things, situations and circumstances looked better immediately. I could see my potential powerfully rising, and I began to see heights and dream dreams I'd never dared to think I'd see. And this time it was no pipe dream.

If I may, let me ask you a question—do you believe most people will achieve their full potential? Almost everyone I ask this question answers no. Over years of dealing with people, I have learned that a person's potential is far beyond what most ever realize. I would be willing to wager that your potential is far greater than you realize or recognize, too. I'm not talking about vocational achievement or financial success, although that may be part of it. I'm talking about your wildest dreams of a rich, full life. A life of satisfaction and fulfillment and relationships. A life you can be proud of and that leaves the ones you love better because you were here. Sometimes you need someone to help you truly see your potential—a guide or mentor who can point the way, or better yet show it to you. Who better to help you climb a mountain like potential than someone like me who began so deep in the valley?

Now, let me ask you what I think is a far more important question. Do you think you'll ever achieve your own full potential? Think about that seriously for a moment, because the question matters far more than you realize. It requires reflection and some honest thought. Your view and vision may be blocked by the storm clouds of poor choices, bad breaks or false starts, but if you let them, the skies will clear.

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THE CLIMB OF YOUR LIFE

You may be like I was, going the wrong way; but you can get on the right path. However I don't think you can do it alone. No one can get that far solo.

Today I can tell you that in the 24 years since I left that hospital room, I've climbed a few mountains. I'm pastor of a church that has almost 3000 worshippers attending weekly. There are still no pews, few hymns and no dressing up. I have a beautiful wife and three nearly grown children. The relationships in my life are plentiful and healthy. You could say I've reached my potential, or at least a large part of it, so I speak from experience when I tell you I may have started alone, but I didn't get here alone. It just doesn't happen that way.

We all need partners—friends who will run, walk and climb with us. Every successful mountain climber has a companion, a partner, friend, or guide who helps him or her climb over and past the difficult parts, even when you think you can't climb another step. If you would permit me, I would love to be a “stand-in Sherpa”—a guide if you will, to help you on your climb. That's what I'm hoping this book will be for you—an aide to help you surpass the summits that have, so far, seemed impossible to reach.

Sir Edmund Hillary was the first climber to successfully conquer Mt. Everest. He received many awards and accolades for his achievement, yet he always reminded people he spoke to that he was not the only climber and that his guide deserved more credit for the historical triumph. Like Sir Edmund Hillary, we all need help. Now I have never climbed Mt. Everest, and you won't find my name in many record books, but I have climbed my own mountain. One of the reasons I am writing this book is that I have

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had so much help on the climb, such great mentors—guides that helped me navigate through the tough spots.

I've been able to help others, too, thousands of people around the world as they make their own ascent toward heights others only dream of. On my own personal journey I discovered that there were many mountains that had blocked my way. In the chapters to follow we will begin an exciting exploration into your world to enable you to climb the mountains that seem to hinder so many others from experiencing an unbelievable life.

Oh yeah, remember that day in the hospital when the doctors couldn't find the cause of my pain? It vanished mysteriously the day I partnered with God. When the pain left, I asked the doctor to release me. He simply said, "Fine," and shook his head as he signed my release. Amazing, huh? Nothing was the same after that day. It was like getting onto a rollercoaster—the excitement you feel when the bar drops, locking you in, and the cart lurches forward. What a ride! What a climb!

I am no different from anyone else. I've achieved so many of my dreams, and you can too. Today can be a brand new start for you. As we walk through these pages, I believe you will find hope and help to live the most awesome life you could ever encounter. The journey to your potential will be the climb of your life!