

Glimber copes with tragedy in Mt. Everest expedition

BY GREG KOWALEKI
STAFF WRITER

It was bitter cold 400 feet below the summit of Mt. Everest on the Nepal-Tibet border where Bloomfield Hills businessman and attorney Louis Kasischke was weighing a decision that would mean the difference between life and death.

To turn back would be to lose perhaps his only chance ever to reach the summit of the world's tallest mountain. To go on would be to risk death.

Starved for oxygen, frostbitten and numbed by sub-zero temperatures, he struggled to choose.

"I looked into myself. I always was a person who was significantly guided by instincts. Something told me this risk was a bad risk," Kasischke said.

Once again his instincts proved true. He turned back to the base camp. Five of his companions pressed on.

And they died in what was one of the worst disasters in the history of climbing Mt. Everest.

Seated in his office at Dykema Gossett law firm in Bloomfield Hills three weeks later, the only visible reminders of the ordeal were Kasischke's bandaged fingertips. One remains painfully black and swollen.

What is not visible is the emotional toll the loss of his friends has had on Kasischke. "One of the things I've been trying to sort out is what all the reasons are from this," Kasischke said. Why did he survive, he asked.

"Was it luck? Common sense? Intuition? There's a meaning here, he said. He just doesn't know what it is.

What is clear is what happened.

An avid mountaineer, Kasischke has been climbing for about 20 years. He's conquered the highest peaks on every continent, except for the biggest Mt. Everest.

A year ago he heard of an expedition being formed out of New Zealand. Kasischke applied and was accepted to the expedition made up of 10 climbers from

New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia and the United States, and 15 sherpas, who are local guides.

He spent a year training, doing cross-country skiing, running hills, and stairs and lifting weights.

The expedition arrived at Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, in March. They marched 60 miles through the Khumba Valley to Mt. Everest.

Base camp was established on April 9 at 17,500 feet at the foot of the Khumba Ice Falls.

"The Himalayas are an unbelievable place. It is great to be in a place I've read about and studied for years," Kasischke wrote to his wife, Sandy. He faxed her updates on the expedition nearly daily.

But all was not right. "Deep snows are creating problems," he wrote. "The yaks carrying our gear to base camp can't move in deep snow." And he was suffering from stomach pains.

But the expedition progressed. "Yesterday we climbed to

19,500 feet through the notorious Khumba Ice Falls. Statistically a high portion of fatalities have occurred in the ice fall. Crossing wide crevasses and climbing vertical walls of ice took all my concentration."

Camp One was established at 20,000 feet, Camp Two at 21,500 feet and Camp Three at 23,000 feet.

"It is not so much about climbing Mt. Everest as it is about surviving Mt. Everest," he wrote.

The climbers progressed. Camp Four was established at 26,500 feet, about 2,000 feet below the summit.

Poised for the final assault, the group was stuck at Camp Four because of bad weather.

Around 8:30 p.m. on May 9 it improved. "We concluded it was clear and calm," Kasischke said. Going for summit was a "reasonable shot to take."

The snow and ice reflected the moonlight, giving plenty of light for the climb.

The sun came up at about 6 a.m., and Kasischke had reached

South Peak, a small summit 300 feet below the top of Mt. Everest. But it was there he could go no further.

"I took off my gloves to scoop up some snow for water. All my fingers were frostbitten. I could see they were looking pretty bad."

Five other members of the party went on. Then the weather turned bad.

A blizzard ripped across the narrow ridge between South Peak and the summit.

Of the five that went on, three froze and two fell. Only one man made it back and he was seriously frostbitten.

By the time Kasischke reached base camp he was snow blind and unable to see for two days. The expedition survivors were soon rescued.

"Emotionally, it didn't register until I got back to base camp and was out of danger," said Kasischke. "Then I began to think. How could this happen?"



Climbing: Louis Kasischke makes his way up the slope of Mt. Everest.

BUSINESS MILESTONES

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and public relations. Kero is based at the company's corporate headquarters in Farmington Hills. She will be responsible for media placement and advertising, and will oversee all outside print and advertising vendor accounts. Kero replaces former director Beverly Ward, who retired March 31. Kero previously ran her own graphic design firm in Ann Arbor.

Sheri R. Collins of Farmington Hills has been named to the Michigan Sales and Service, Special Market Department at Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Collins joined BCBS in 1992 and held the position of sales trainer. Sales and Market training.

Murder, Mystery & Mayhem Books & Collectibles, formally in Livonia, has reopened in Farmington under new ownership. The new store is located at 35167 Grand River in the Drakshire Plaza. The store's specialty is mystery, espionage, horror and suspense books and accessories.

Burns & Wilcox, Ltd., the national firm of underwriting managers and insurance brokers, has named Jeanne Kero as new director of advertising



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