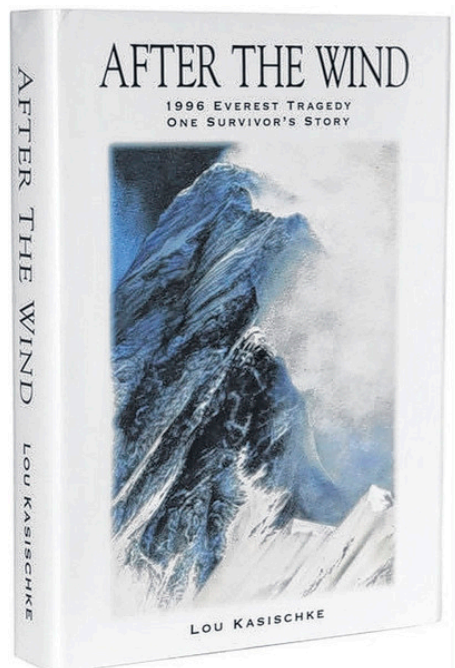


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'After the Wind:' Love made the difference between life and death

Glen YoungNews-Review writer May 6, 2014



In his new book "After the Wind," Good Hart author Lou Kasischke says there was a moment when, "A veiled force overpowered me." His heart pounding, his fingers frostbitten, he writes, "Everything else went quiet." Kasischke was just a few hundred feet from the summit of Mount Everest.

What happened next encouraged Kasischke to publish his first account of that notable climb.

"What meant everything was what it would take to overcome a mountain of ambition and pressure to succeed, and to make a hard choice," Kasischke said.

Kasischke did not make the summit, but says instead he found direction in "the still, small voice" that he heard "after the wind." The 1996 climb, the subject of other books before now, is notable because eight climbers died. Trouble came from many corners on that climb, when human error put climbers in dangerous weather well past an agreed upon turn-around time. Until this past April, this was the most deadly day ever on Everest.

Kasischke, part of an experienced team climbing with veteran guide Rob Hall, believes some of the troubles came from the presence of journalist Jon Krakauer. Working for Outside Magazine, and later famous for "Into Thin Air," an account of the 1996 climb, Krakauer put the other climbers on edge. His online updates of the expedition reported members' climbing skills to the world in real time. Kasischke acknowledges that Krakauer did aide others in the aftermath, but when asked if Krakauer's presence influenced the outcome, says, "You bet it did."

Hall summited Everest previously, as had his counterpart Scott Fisher, another prominent guide on the mountain that season. Hall and Fisher, friends but also competitors, each hoped to guide their clients to the top of the world, and Kasischke believes this competition, though amicable, also led to the tragedy. The two skilled guides unexpectedly decided to push for the summit on the same day: May 10.

In his chapter on "The Hedge," Kasischke explains, "Rob and Scott hedged the business and publicity competition by agreeing to go to the summit on the same day" deciding on "a shared outcome in which both expeditions would get to the top of the world or neither would." He admits he was not privy to their discussion, but says, "There was no upside to going together." He believes emphatically, "There would be no tragedy in 1996 but for going on the same day."

This is not simply a climbing story, however. "After The Wind" is also a love story. Kasischke wrote what he initially referred to as "the pages," some 160,000 words, soon after his experience. He's published only recently, though, because, "The reasons for writing were different than the reasons for publishing."

The strength to turn back when he didn't want to came from Sandy, he says, his wife of nearly 47 years. "I just wanted people to know her part in the story. I wanted to honor her."

Sandy's role in the events is traced early on to chapter two, "The Ritual."

Kasischke, who has climbed big mountains on all seven continents, explains the ritual of initiating a climb always involved Sandy. "We both knew if Sandy said no that was it." In 1996, unlike ever before, she asked Lou to promise, succeed or not, he try Everest only once. "This was the first time I could remember Sandy asking for anything," he writes. Kasischke agreed, because it "was a fair request."

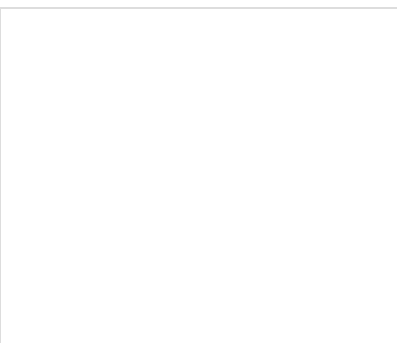
Adventure story and love story, Kasischke writes that their story is even more about how we all confront our own daily dilemmas. "How do you prepare for the challenge within," he wonders in the book. "What prepared me and influenced me to determine the outcome was this personal relationship; it was the love." He says, "What made the difference between life and death resided in my heart."

With carefully rendered pencil drawings from Kasischke's Good Hart neighbor, Jane Cardinal, "After The Wind" takes readers along on an adventure already known around the world. Until now, however, the story of how this Northern Michigan climber faced down his fears of failure and found the strength to make the right decision has been known to only a few.

"After The Wind" is available at Between the Covers in Harbor Springs, as well as McLean & Eakin in Petoskey, or from Amazon.com. More information on the book is available at Kasischke's website www.afterthewind.com.

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