

## More Than a Mountain: One Woman's Everest

*Book Reviewed by Carrie Nolan*

Loeffler, TA. (2008). *More than a mountain: One woman's Everest*. St. John's, NJ: Creative Publishers. ISBN 978-1897174272

Rarely are adventure narratives written with as much humor, candor, and humility as TA Loeffler's *More Than a Mountain: One Woman's Everest*. Through personal narration, this thoroughly engaging book covers a timeline from June 2005 until July 2007, spanning Loeffler's Everest journey from inception to homecoming. Though written in a mostly chronological fashion, her book does not lose the reader in the day-to-day details as some adventure narratives tend to do; rather, the book carries the reader forward by linking back to a bigger picture of the expedition.

Many of us, as experiential educators, tout the slogan "It's not the end that matters, but the journey"; yet few of us embody this slogan in the way that Loeffler does, as is apparent in her telling of her adventures in this biographical tale. In a world of adventure literature and film that names heroes according to the conquests, here is a book that makes for a different sort of hero, but a hero nonetheless. Loeffler has written about her journey in such a way as to invite us to brilliantly reconceptualize success. Yes, the top of Everest is a laudable goal, but so are the goals of sharing with community, overcoming fear, and learning to listen intuitively. There are other summits beyond the top of a mountain. Loeffler's Everest journey pays attention to, and acknowledges, these other summits, and this journey sees her stand on many of them. In this, the expedition was a success and Loeffler a hero. This book reveals that on her expedition to Everest she is present to the lessons, challenges, and blessings of each moment along the way. The strength of the book rests in communicating these personal aspects of her journey.

Though not intended as an instructional book, *More Than a Mountain* could serve as a launching pad for curriculum in an expedition man-

agement course. It covers key aspects of both planning and living out an expedition, such as mission and goals; physical training; sponsorship and fundraising; international travel; health and well-being; marketing; risk management; and communication through oral presentations, media, and website. In addition to expedition logistics, Loeffler also communicates the emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual aspects of an expedition. The book contrasts with other adventure narratives because of how success is conceptualized, celebrated, and valued.

As this book centers on Loeffler herself, let me speak to what I believe she exemplifies. Loeffler's passion for mountains and people is evident in the pages of this book. She didn't approach Everest as a half-hearted enthusiast. The desire to climb mountains is proven by climbing. The desire to be a writer is proven by writing. Loeffler climbs and writes. If her passions or desire stopped at loving and living in the outdoors, she wouldn't have gone to the trouble that she has to communicate this passion to others. I found Loeffler's story to be inspiring, and I value her emphasis on understanding, care, and practice, as well as the alternative she offers to the "conquest" theme that permeates much of mountaineering literature. Reading of her adventures is like what I imagine an oxygen-saturated breath is like at high altitude: relieving and clarifying.

My only disappointment with this book was that it ended. While this particular adventure narrative had its end, Loeffler continues to live adventurously and to dedicate time and energy to sharing those adventures. *More Than a Mountain* is an excellent read for all—the armchair adventurer, the weekend warrior, the outdoor adventure student, and those who dare to dream as big as Loeffler. Perhaps most importantly, Loeffler contributes to an emerging body of alternative adventure narratives.

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