

bridges, and we floundered through new powder so deep we would never find bottom.

Unroping, moving on our own, we attained the mountain's principal ridge. None of us had ever witnessed such a sight. The entire range of glistening peaks and sheer rock pinnacles shimmered before us in the bright sun. For a moment I stood lost in amazement. Then I took a single step forward and felt the world disappear beneath my feet.

I'd made a deadly error. Fatigue combined with overconfidence had caused me to succumb to an optical

illusion. Through the dark lenses of my glacier goggles, I had confused the snow beneath my boots with the whiteness beyond and had strolled blithely over the lip of the abyss! The once-gentle ridge top was now an ice cornice with a jagged edge that ended in a spectacular drop of several thousand feet.

So, it seemed, had my life. As I teetered forward, my mind filled with regret and the recrimination that must be the final thought of many soon-to-be-no-more climbers: what an idiot! Suddenly, there was a tug at my waist and I felt myself being jerked backward. Glancing

over my shoulder I saw McAndrews, rope in hand, leaning back, counterbalancing my weight with his. A split second more and I'd have been on a one-way ride to oblivion. Instead, overcome with vertigo, I fell to my hands and knees on the ice.

"Thank you," I gasped.

The summit was in sight. We moved slowly upward along the ridge, climbing through haystacks of rime ice. McAndrews, who was at the front of the team, stopped and motioned for me to take the last

lead. The final pitch was steep but not technically difficult. Securing the rope with a boot-ax belay, I guided each member of the team to within a few feet of the summit. When we were all in place, we joined hands and stepped to the top. Spontaneously, we began to sing.

You never conquer a mountain. If you make the summit, all you have conquered is yourself. There, on that peak, we gained the upper hand on our fears, our self-doubts, our own inner inertia. On the

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Carol Lovejoy is the author of *Living In Two Worlds*, and *A Spiritual Handbook For The New Millennium, Our Journey Back to Eden*. Carol is also the founder of the Wholeness Institute, a metaphysician, mystic, lecturer, and workshop leader.

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