The pictures in this story are a compilation from all the team members. John Simonsen wrote the story.

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OSU Denali 2000 Expedition

“You cannot stay on the summit forever; you have to come down again. So why bother in the first place?

Because what is below does not know what is above, but what is above knows what is below.

One climbs, one sees. One descends, one sees no longer, but one has seen.

There is an art of conducting oneself in the lower regions by the memory of what one saw higher up.

When one can no longer see, one can at least still know.”
**Beginnings**

In 1963 Kuku (that’s Hawaiian for grandparent) and Uncle Jim attempted Denali via the West Buttress route. They were caught in a storm at the 16,400 foot camp. When the weather broke, they managed to get to Denali pass, but no further. David wasn’t even born then. I met Uncle Jim at the airport on May 23, 2000 as we were waiting for our flight to Anchorage. He came to see David off and to wish us well. Thirty seven years later Denali was still important to him.

When David was just a child, Kuku and Uncle Jim would relate their mountaineering adventures to the family members. David was fascinated. And the fact that the family mountaineers had yet to summit Denali was not lost on him. Somewhere in his formative years David made a commitment to himself: Someday he would stand on the summit of Denali.

His dream came close to being a reality in 1994. That year David was part of a team from Portland. They turned around at 17,000’, but that’s another story.

I’ve been climbing with David for about eight years now. We met when he was a student and I a faculty member at Oregon State University (OSU). Although he is 19 years younger than me and much stronger and a better climber than I ever was, we get along well and have had many epic adventures together. We had been talking about Denali for many years, but in 1994 I wasn’t ready. That was a year after I had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and my life was full of healing procedures, both traditional and alternative. I went into remission a few months after the diagnosis, and have stayed there, but have to go on the medicine about three months out of the year to do it. Cancer has brought me many insights and gifts, but that, too, is another story.

In the spring of 1999 David and I talked about Denali again, and I realized that if I was ever going to actually do something besides talk, I should do it now. After all, I was 52 years old. So I said, “Let’s go to Denali.” It’s interesting how sometimes a little intention can go a long way. It seems like everything just clicked into place once we actually made the decision to go. David was the obvious choice for leader, and he quickly and easily assumed the leadership role. After a lifetime of preparing, he had all the information and was beyond motivated for this expedition. Had I known then what a huge commitment of time and money, and what an enormous undertaking Denali would turn out to be, I would have given the decision more thought.

David said a team of either four or six would be optimum, so through the summer and fall we talked to many people, looking for teammates. While there was a lot of interest from a wide variety of people, genuine commitment was rare. I announced the expedition in the OSU Mountain Club, where I am the faculty advisor. A young man came up after the meeting and announced his desire to be part of the team. We traded emails. That was John Dove, who became the youngest member of the team. Later on, someone at work suggested I contact John Punches, who works in my
department. He was excited to be asked and quickly joined the team. In yoga class I was talking to Suzanne, Kyle’s partner. David and I both had climbed with Kyle. He was a bit reluctant at first, but eventually became the fifth team member. Ryan Singleton came on later. He also works in my department at the University and heard about us through the grapevine. Although he was short on experience, Ryan was, and is, incredibly strong, fit, level-headed, and a very quick learner. Other people were considered for the team, but by January, 2000, the sorting process had sifted down to these six. We met and laid out a training program for ourselves. Since there were three John’s on the team, we used last names. Punches was an instructor in crevasse rescue, so we scheduled classes for the team with him as instructor. We also planned several outings as a team, and several indoor sessions prussiking up fixed lines and practicing crevasse rescue. Team members were assigned to study altitude illnesses, food planning, climbing strategies, crevasse travel, and give presentations to the team at group meetings. A convivial and supportive team spirit quickly emerged. We had good energy among us.