

Mile High Life



By John Amatt

As a professional speaker and adventurer, I constantly try to live the words of the eminent French Explorer, Samuel de Champlain, the first European to explore the Great Lakes. He once wrote, "The advice I give to all adventurers is to seek a place where they may sleep in safety". He defines what I believe is the only real security we need in our lives.

But as a kid growing up in England, I lived in a very protected world and was painfully shy and insecure. In fact, I can still recall situations where the idea of speaking to strangers left me quaking in my boots. So it wasn't until I started climbing mountains that I discovered the potential that lay hidden within me.

On one early climb, my father and I were hiking up Ben Nevis in Scotland, the highest mountain in the British Isles. It was raining, I was cold and tired and we were a long way from the top. I told my dad I wanted to go back to the car. I can still recall him looking down at me with a stern face. He said, "If you turn around now, you'll regret it for the rest of your life." His words shamed me to keep going and I have never looked back.

**As seen in*

**"Chicken Soup
for the
Entrepreneurial
Soul"**

By the age of 20, I was looking for greater challenges. Having heard of the unclimbed "Vertical Mile" Troll Wall in Norway, I decided with three friends to give it a try.

More experienced climbers said it couldn't be done. There were stories of people who had hiked up the back of the mountain, laid on their stomachs looking over the edge and pushed huge boulders off into the void ... and had watched as those rocks fell straight down through the air without touching anything for over 5,000 feet. We were determined to prove the doubters wrong, to prove that the impossible could be made possible by taking it one foot at a time.

The hardest part of the climb came the night before we were to start, trying to sleep at the base of the cliff, looking up at this huge black mass stretching up into the stars. As we listened to rocks whistling through the air, our minds were a turmoil of anxiety, worrying about all the things that could go wrong up there. But we knew that unless we conquered the fear and started the climb, we would never discover if we were up to the challenge.

The next day, we began the inch by inch struggle up the "Vertical Mile". It was painfully slow and we endured rain, sleet, falling rocks and gusts of icy wind as we moved higher. At night, we tied ourselves onto ledges no more than two feet wide and tried to sleep. Looking down at the thousands of feet of space below us, we never had a problem knowing which side of the bed to get out of in the morning!

As we neared the summit, I was bringing up the rear as my companions attacked the final overhang. One by one, they disappeared from sight above me and I was left hanging on the rock face with the rope as my only link to safety. Unable to communicate, I waited for their signal to follow.

As my mind drifted, time slowly

passed by. Glancing at my watch, I suddenly realized I had been dangling in midair thousands of feet above solid ground for two hours. My imagination began to race. Had something gone wrong? Had someone been injured in a fall? Had they been knocked unconscious by falling rock? Or worse.



The infamous "Troll Wall" in Norway is not only vertical but overhanging for more than 5,000 vertical feet, making it the highest and steepest mountain precipice in Europe. Many of the best climbers in the world had deemed it unclimbable. Yet in 1965, John Amatt made the first successful ascent with partners Tony Howard, Tony Nicholls, and Bill Tweedale.

My gruesome thoughts were interrupted as the rope shook. It was my sign to start climbing. Enormous relief swept through my body, followed by a surge of adrenaline as I climbed through the overhanging rock and rejoined my friends.

The next day we finished the climb and reached the top. We had accomplished the impossible and completed an ascent which is now a classic in world mountaineering. But I knew that this was just the

beginning. Having opened up this door, I now wondered how many other climbs were possible?

Today, most of the mountains I face are in my mind. On a real mountain top, there are vast vistas of other peaks to see and reach for. But in business, the summit changes and isn't always that clearly defined. But if you think of your business goals as a mountain to be climbed, it helps to keep you focused. Then you can plan all the single steps along the way that will help you reach your goal.

Sometimes I find myself again at the bottom of the "Vertical Mile", worrying about all the things that 'might be' as I move into uncharted territory. And I remember what my dad said so long ago and I keep going. Only by continually striving to go 'one step beyond' can I hope to learn what I might eventually become!

John Amatt is founder and president of One Step Beyond WorldWide, an innovative educational and motivational company dedicated to the development of effective teamwork and the pursuit of personal peak performance in corporate and professional life. He is a former teacher and professional mountain guide who, in 1982, organized and took part in Canada's first successful expedition to reach the top of the world, the 29,035 foot summit of Mount Everest.

*John is also the author of **Straight to the Top and Beyond: Nine Keys for Meeting the Challenge of Changing Times**. He has spoken to more than 750,000 people in 44 countries world wide. To book John Amatt for your next speaking engagement, please contact your local speakers bureau. ✍*