

Malcolm Daly's accident on Thunder Mountain in the Alaska Range on 5/19/99

I am 44 years old presently. This is Sunday, 5/30/99. I am lying in a bed at Providence Hospital in Anchorage, AK. I suffered some fairly serious injuries and here is the story of how I suffered and recovered.

I came up here 5/11 with my climbing partner, Jim Donini, one of the best known alpinists in the world. He specializes in high standard rock and ice climbing in extreme environments. Jim has been one of my heroes since the early 70s when I started reading of his exploits in the long lost mountain ranges of Patagonia and Peru and Alaska and such. Jim and I had come to Alaska to try a new route on the southeast side of Mt. Hunter and when Paul Roderick of Talkeetna Air Taxi flew us in on 5/12 we landed on a flat, glacial plain, an arm of the Tokositna Glacier below Thunder Mountain. That was late in the afternoon and we bunkered in and woke up to a glorious morning the next day, looking at terrain that we had not even known existed. Thunder Mountain is a beautiful, craggy, split spire with a lot of snow gully kind of things up the middle of it, snow and alpine gullies and then rock buttresses splitting them. After a brief hike around the glacier we decided that we would do a tune-up route on Thunder Mountain because Hunter was such a big project. So we got our gear together and woke up the next morning at 6:00 AM, hiked up the snow cone at the base of the gully that we were looking at to Mt. Thunder and took steps up to the base of the ice fall. It was about 10:00 AM about the time that we got here and, although we knew that we could climb fast, we were in a virtual drain pipe of small rocks, pebbles and ice chips that were coming down. We decided to come back and return on a better day. The next part of that afternoon when we returned to camp we packaged some gear for Mt. Hunter and took a walk over to the base of the southeast buttress of Mt. Hunter and cached some food in our bivouac tent there just to save some time and have it there because we were curious.

The next morning the alarm went off at 2:00 AM and this time we punched our way up to the ice cone at the base of the ice fall and started to climb. We reached the base of this ice fall about 4:00 AM and got a way up. It was my lead since Jim gives the novices the first lead and I tried a rock variation to the left with no luck. It was a bunch of rotten rock with strung together placements that did not inspire confidence up a gully that was a rock gully/wash type of thing. It was steeper and harder than it looked. So I left that gear in place and traversed over right to the ice fall and climbed up that a ways. I was about 40-50 feet up there when I realized that this was a dead-end also. I had my pack on and the ice was horribly loose and rotten and very difficult and quite horizontal, in other words, extreme mixed ice climbing and rotten, gnarly ice in a remote situation. So I came down. Jim gave it a try. He looked at the rock section and climbed up about as far as I did and said that this won't go. He looked at what I had on the ice fall and he decided that, no, he didn't want to try that either. So we pulled all that gear down. Jim thought that he could thread a way through the rock bands on the left side of the gully when you are looking up the mountains. Sure enough, we found a 7 pitch variation that took us out to the left several hundred feet and then up a hundred feet or so and then back down on some ledge systems back into the gully. It turned out to be a very involved, long process and fairly technical alpine, very dangerous climbing, rotten rock, falling snow, falling rock, complex route finding, difficulties in protecting the 2nd, the usual sort of thing, lots of gravel and water around.

But anyway, we did this and Jim led the last pitch out of this traverse back into the gully and up about 50 feet up the gully to the base of the snow ramp, which is the final slog part of it before the beautiful 500-700 foot ice fall that really caught our eye from our base camp. We plowed our way up this ice apron; it was more of an arena actually, but the chasm turned from just a narrow chimney into a gulf where three distinct gully systems bifurcated and came together to form a giant arena of very steep snow, maybe 60-65', a little bit of ice here and there, but technical difficulties were quite easy for Jim and me. We cramponed our way up

and I in the lead, we had 400 feet of rope strung out between us and we were simul-climbing. When I was about half way up it started to snow on me quite hard and visibility got bad. Neither of those is an issue but it started knocking down spindrift avalanches onto my head and neck. Every time I warned Jim that one was coming I would yell, 'avalanche!' and we would get washed by another one. I got to the base of the ice funnel and got in some rock anchors and then Jim came up. By that time it was 5:30 PM and I was not particularly interested in continuing this route that day. I was about to tell Jim that when he told me that he had a problem. He showed me his crampons. He completely curled around the front points of one of his crampons. He had taken his salesman sample, which is a non heat treated sample and used that for convenience and now he was paying the price. So we rappelled down the gully and down climbed from our high point at the top of that apron and came out on the glacier and lo and behold, if Paul Roderick from TAT didn't fly by at about 9:45 PM. We told him we needed a crampon, he said, 'no problem' and by 8:00 AM the next morning he had one in for us. That really is amazing.

We spent that next day on the glacier, drying things out and preparing food and getting psyched to do the route and got up early the next morning, headed up the hill. Again, we made quite good time up the snow gully. When we had rappelled down we had left a fixed rope over the ice fall portion of it so we wouldn't have to do that 7 foot pitch variation, with all the dangers that lie lurking underneath traversing and things. The only problem is that the rope was completely frozen in ice. There was about a 3" barrel of ice over the rope. It made it very difficult to climb on an ascender. I really wanted to climb this ice, not just simply ascend the rope, and it was very difficult to try to pull the rope through the ice, make sure the ascender was clamped on the rope so that it could catch a fall if I needed, and then climb the ice. But, we did work it out. It was the hardest pitch I've ever done of any ice anywhere, but it was wild. Jim led the next pitch and I had anchored myself off to the side of the gully. He was up near the top of it and something large came down and hit me on my left arm, right above my left elbow. I don't

know whether it was a rock or a piece of ice or something Jim had kicked off or not. There was no way to tell now. But it was a terrible blow and my left arm went completely numb and limp for 4 minutes or so; completely useless. I couldn't flex it, bend it; couldn't sling it, move it. Initially I thought it was broken but apparently not. It swelled up fairly badly and Jim and I decided to rappel down and bail out so I could recover; which we did. This time we left two fixed ropes, we left one on the upper pitch and on the lower pitch so we would be able to ascend to our high point fairly easily when the times presented themselves well.

After many days of battling with alarm clocks and getting up late and getting up early and thinking if my arm was too sore or not, finally on the 19th we woke up on time, my arm was feeling quite good and it was time to get up the glacier, get up this route. We crunched our way up the snow. We were at the base of the upper ice funnel and this was where, a few days earlier, we had been at 5:30 PM, we were here now at 8:45 AM. So there was a considerable improvement in time. We got this route fairly well wired to the point where we thought we could get it done. I led the first pitch, Jim belayed me and it was the most beautiful pitch of ice I had ever led. It was probably close to 150 feet of dead vertical, slightly overhanging, thick, plastic, wonderful ice that just seemed to be dying to take my tool placements. It felt so good climbing this. It was steep and it was bumpy but it was relatively easy ice and I felt extremely solid on it. I led the pitch, but in a belay and Jim led the next pitch, again another pitch of very, very good ice, a little bit rampier than mine. Jim set up a belay off to the left so that he could stay out of the way of any falling debris I might knock off on the left pitch and hung there. I climbed up to him and offered him the last pitch since this was clearly a nicer pitch than the one he just left and also clearly the last pitch of the route of significant climbing. He said, 'no, you keep it, you are the one who deserves the gift', so I led up. The first 70-80 feet was a beautiful ice funnel on the left wall, again more of that beautiful ice that just takes your tools really positively, only fractures out as much as it needs to and was perfect ice. At the top of that pitch, maybe 10 feet from the top I got a really solid ice screw in and clipped into that

with a long runner and then pulled over the top of the bulge and then went up 40 or 50 feet up kind of a snow ramp to the next 10 or 15 foot section. At the bottom of it, way in the back I was able to get in an ice screw. It was not good one, but I was able to get it in and the ice finally didn't look hard. I moved out to the left. Up here the consistency of the ice had changed from that wonderful plastic, good stuff to more of a mealy, corn snow consistency and I moved up it, feeling very confident and secure and well within my capabilities of leading. When I got to the top I remember very specifically thinking, 'wow, this is beautiful but I wish I had a piece of rock gear.' I had my left hand on a big piece of rock sticking out, a jug we call it. My left foot was straddling a rock that appeared to be very frozen into the matrix below it and my right foot was kicked into a hole in the snow/ice mixture that was a footstep. My right hand was just sort of looking for the next move. I remember very clearly thinking, 'gosh, this next move is it and then there are no more moves on the route. We are essentially up.' And that is the last thing I remember until I fell. I may have gotten hit by a rock in the face, I may have broken out the foothold my right foot was standing in, my left ice tool may have created some problems. I don't know. I have no recollection of it. I have that survivor's amnesia, I guess, which has caused me to lose every bit of it.

When I came to I remember Jim yelling at me, 'Malcolm, Malcolm, are you okay? Are you alive?' I said yes but I also remember looking down at my feet very disgustedly seeing that they clearly were broken. They were flopping around at the end of my ankles and blood was dripping down from them into the snow. Blood was dripping down off from my head into the snow. I had some scalp injuries there. Apparently Jim had yelled at me for a few minutes. He doesn't know how many minutes it was but he yelled at me for a few minutes, trying to determine if I was dead or not. He had no response, but finally after hollering for a few minutes the first sign of life he got from me was my asking him if I had been leading and then if I had fallen. Of course, ludicrous questions because I had fallen 140-150 feet, we don't know. So anyway, when I finally sort of stabilized myself and realized that I could actually act in my behalf, I put in two

ice screws and clipped them together and clipped my harness to that and untied my rope and said, 'Jim, come on down, I'm safe.' He rappelled down to me. I was probably about 60 feet lower than him. On the way down he discovered that the rope that I had been leading on had chopped almost entirely in half. There were two core strands left out of a starting of 12 core strands and a bunch of sheath strands, so I had come very, very close, within a hare's breath, of just dying from chopping the rope. I have no idea how that happened. We were both pretty shaken by that because that could have easily meant my death, with one more bounce, literally. It is always dramatic when you chop your core lifeline.

Jim lowered himself down to me and rappelled down to me. At this point we began to analyze our situation, what my injuries were a little bit more. Jim and I were together. We were safe, we weren't dead. It turned out that Jim had some injuries as well. As I had gone by, despite the fact that he was 15 feet off to one side I had hit him on the way down and punctured his thigh, hit him a pretty hard blow because he was having white brain flashes and eyeball flashes and bleeding out of a couple places in his Gore-Tex suit which had ripped up. It was clear that I had a compound fracture in at least one foot and, too, I think I guessed at that point I also knew that I had injured my left finger but my back seemed to be working, my hands were working, my neck, my head. In general, I think I was in okay shape. So the first thing to do was to try to stabilize my lower legs and so we took my ice ax and put it between my feet and took my two rolls of tape and I taped everything together to try to stabilize as a unit everything together. At that point we fashioned a sling out of an atrie that I could put my two feet through and also put my head through the sling and by arching my back I could actually cause it to lift my legs and keep them up and out of the way so when I was being lowered down I wouldn't further injure myself. I knew, because of the compound injuries, that bleeding was a danger and I didn't want to make anything any worse.

Jim lowered me down 170-180 feet. I don't know how long, but I found a very nice perch right at the top of the snow field, down below, off to the right and it had a perfect horn for a sling. I just sat on this perch. It was dry and fairly warm. I think we were still in the sun and I sat there until Jim came down. I looped the sling over a horn to protect myself in case Jim had hurt himself. Anyway, I stayed perched on that rock and Jim came down to me. He said, "what do you want to do?" We had a little pow-wow to decide our strategy because it was obvious that lowering me with those neck slings and that jury-rigged thing was not good. The packs we had did not have removable foam pads. There was no way I could take them out and roll them around my foot or something like that to create a large tube to contain my feet. Finally I said, "Jim, I think we need to get the helicopter. I think you have to go get a rescue." I said, "God help us, it is going to be hard." I knew what kind of position I was in and what kind of weather patterns we had been having and things like that. Anyway, Jim chopped me out a ledge that was about 18" deep and ran about 5 feet long and I lowered myself down to that from the rock anchors Jim had set in right above me and made myself comfortable. Jim and I took everything out of his pack and took the lid off of his pack and cut the laces of my boots and loosened them as much as we could, opened them up and relaxed the fit on the gaiters to try to help with any circulation that we could. Then we stuck those boots into the pack. It was very difficult, because of course my legs had no integrity. I couldn't just stuff them in. I got them about 3/4-2/3 of the way into the pack and then put them on the ledge. Then I sat on my pack and Jim took everything out of it that I was going to need to use just to sort of fill in the gaps around my butt and try to keep the wind from whistling around. Then we decided it was time to go. We did a quick inventory of what I had. Jim left me all of the clothing and water and he took all the rope and the rock and ice gear. The plan was for him to tie the two ropes together in the middle, also tie a knot around where the rope had been cut so that there wouldn't be any stressing that anymore and then he would do one long 400 foot rappel down as far as he could down the snow apron, down that arena. When he got anchored he would holler

up and I would cut the ropes and then we would be separated for good. He rappelled down. It was about 5:00 PM, maybe 3:30, maybe 5:30, I don't remember. He rappelled down into that arena and I said goodbye and gave him a big hug and said, 'God Jim, be safe' because I knew that he was injured, he had been having those white flashes, he had bled a little bit and I knew that we couldn't blow this one. But, boy, if anyone could get down it would be Jim Donini. When Jim left and I had released the rope, that was sort of a moment of introspection for me. I was truly cut off from the rest of the world. Jim had all the gear, all the ropes, any method of getting down was now in Jim's hand and even if I had changed my mind right at that point and decided that I wanted to rappel down I would not have been able to. I left it 100% in Jim's hands. The other thing I did was thought a lot about my feet. It is easy to dwell on your misfortunes and bad luck and certainly I thought a lot about my feet. I had gotten a lot of use out of them. I loved my feet. They were great ski feet and climbing feet and snowboarding feet and running feet and biking feet, family feet and I thought a lot about that. I decided I wasn't going to worry about them up here. Their fate is sealed. I don't know what that fate will be but there is nothing I can do that will affect the outcome of my feet, other than worry about them too much and add that level of stress and then perhaps I could hurt my chances of survival. So I put that thought on a shelf and left it. There was no other thinking about it the entire duration on the ledge, other than a few logistical things, kind of make sure they weren't going to fall off and they were packed in. They were in the pack and we had put them on the ledge and packed snow around them. We had packed the snow around for three reasons. One was to prevent anything from knocking them off, to simply stabilize them on the ledge so they wouldn't get swept off somehow. The 2nd reason was to keep them warm, snow pack at its coldest was somewhere in the 20s and I knew it could get a lot colder than that if a storm came in, and 3rd, I wanted to stabilize my feet. I wanted to essentially use the snow as this little cast because I knew that any motion I did, I could just feel the bone ends sliding together, both in my left which now I know has a compound

tib/fib and in my right which now I know is a shattered heel. At the time I didn't know what was what and there was no use for me to explore it. It would have simply been a waste of my time because there was nothing I could do about reducing or repairing anything that was going on with my feet.

I waited and I waited. It had been a warm day and I had been in the sun. I had a lot of adrenaline going for clear reasons and wasn't too cold. But as the sun sort of drew around the buttress we got into deeper and deeper shadows, I did begin to feel cold. That was when I started to do windmills, kind of randomly with both my arms, I would do a bunch of windmills on one side and then a bunch on the other. I would use that to get my core temperature up which had chilled immensely. My fingers would tingle a little bit as if they were getting cold but as soon as I started doing windmills they immediately got better. This was not 19,000 feet trapped on Denali Pass. This was at 10,000 on Thunder Mountain with much milder conditions.

A few hours later, I don't know whether it was 4 or 5 hours later, I finally saw Jim come out of the bottom of the gully. Boy, was that a site for sore eyes. I half expected to see him come hurdling out the gully after having slipped and arriving dead on the glacier below to cancel any chances of our rescue. But, no, he came out slowly, but I could see he was shaky from that distance. I could see he was moving slowly and very carefully and deliberately one step at a time.

So Jim headed over toward the base camp which I couldn't quite see from my perch and disappeared and 15 minutes later I heard the noise of a plane. I saw a plane land, I saw Jim come over to the plane, get in it and leave. Boy, that was the best sight I had ever seen, knowing that he had rescue alert out within 10-15 minutes from the time that he got back to our base camp. It was one of the most heartwarming sights that I had ever seen.

I knew that it wasn't over. I knew that rescue was on the way but rescues aren't always successful and frequently they are unsuccessful. I have been involved in too many of them. But just knowing that our message had got out was important.

A few minutes after the plane left the mists came down over the mountain and these mists had periodically been enveloping Thunder Mountain and draping them and climbing up and down, quite dramatic, very beautiful but 3 or 4 days early they were one of the reasons that we had turned back because they generated snow and we didn't like that snow up in the gully. We couldn't have visibility because of those mists. The mists are a problem with visibility in a rescue too because you cannot fly in a mist like that. That worried me but before I had a chance to worry it started snowing and then more and more and more and more, and pretty soon I was being bombarded by spindrift avalanches one after the other, down one of any three avalanche tracks that all bifurcated right above me. So I had my work cut out for me. I was constantly digging out of these spindrift avalanches one after the other. They would just sweep over and hit me, kind of massage my shoulders. It would feel okay except it was cold. But then I would have to dig out the excess snow to make sure we weren't being incrementally pushed off the ledge and shoved out and then I would have to dig it out from around my back, around anything else that was on the ledge. So I ended up working all night. But it worked. The night went really quickly and I was fine the next morning, full of energy. I was mad at Huey, the weather guy, but I was warm and I was dry. Jim had loaned me his Gore Dri-loft down parka that had down in it, but also a Dri-loft shell and that stuff is truly amazing. That would have been soaking wet if it were a pile jacket or if it had even been a puff ball or something, but I swear this fabric saved my life.

As it got lighter, I was still in the mists and the fog and still getting snowed on. There were still spindrift avalanches coming off but the interval was becoming greater and greater and I knew that with the light rescue would begin to come. So, I waited and waited. It is a frustrating time to wait, early in the morning. It

takes awhile for the rescue team to get staged. It was not like they were hanging out in Talkeetna all ready to go like the fire department somewhere. They were scattered around four different agencies and different people and they are volunteers most of them, so it took me a lot of patience to wait for them.

During the night when I wasn't shoveling spindrift avalanches, I was windmilling. Those are big, wide circles of both of my arms, and I developed a discipline system because I knew that self discipline necessary to maintain a precise count on something like that would help if a survival situation did ensue. So, once the spindrift avalanches stopped coming down so frequently, I would be perched on the ledge there, leaning back against the pack or the snow and drowse off a little bit. I would wake up as soon as I got cold because my goal was not to sleep; I didn't care about sleep. My goal was to stay warm. As soon as I got cold I would wake up and I would do 100 windmills with my right arm and then 100 windmills with my left arm and then 100s of tabletop crunches with my torso and abs. This was easy at first but as I got more and more fatigued it got harder to do. So, to maintain the discipline, I would do 50 on one side and then 50 on the other side, and then 50 on the first side and then 50 on the 2'd side again to make sure that I continued to do 100. I did this all through the 44 hours that I was up there. It was one of my goals - to never, ever cut myself any slack on this; to make sure that I did it and was precise in how I did it every time.

As it got lighter outside the mist cleared and it got quite clear outside. I was really excited to see that the weather was good, because I felt that they could do a rescue this day. But it didn't stay good for very long. It was maybe 11,~ - 2 hours. At about 5:00 AM or so the mist came in again and shrouded the mountains. of course, 5:00 AM was about when they started bringing in the parajumpers and the Alaska Mountain Rescue guys to pull me off the mountain. I disappeared. I had had no contact, visual or oral, with anybody from the rescue team and I heard a plane start flying a vertical search pattern along my cliff wall. I didn't know who it was. I figured maybe it was Paul or somebody like that. This plane

flew back and forth, back and forth, probably 100 laps, each time coming a little higher. Finally, when it was at my altitude, it flew back and forth there a few times with no luck; I didn't see it. Finally, one of the times he came across there was a hole in the clouds. I could see him and I shot both my arms straight up in the air, gave him a 'big yahoo, I'm okay, I'm alive'; not kind of a little, weak flutter of my hand, saying 'help me I am desperate'. My arm motion was a very deliberate attempt to let them know that I was okay and conscious. And, of course, then the plane flew off, the mist closed in and I didn't see anything or other planes during the day.

I also have to say that I never went into what I felt was any kind of shock. I never felt any loss of high level thinking. I never felt like there was going to be a problem with fine motor skills, or anything like that. I was in good shape. My heartbeat stayed at about 70 beats/minute. My fingers weren't getting cold to speak of, although they would occasionally get a little tingly and I would solve that by doing some windmills. I did this all day. It was tough because I could see rescuers in and out of fog and things, trying to mount some kind of rescue. I could see them walking up and down the glacier, trying to decide if there was a way to get up around behind me or whether it would be best to short haul me off. When they would come out and stand in the side, I would give them my big arm wave because I knew they had binoculars and stuff, just to let them know that I was okay but not panicked. I wanted them to be sure that they knew I was calm and rationale.

Finally a helicopter came in and started flying up and down the gully. It was a Llama and I knew that they had a well trained Llama pilot up here. This guy was flying up and down in the clouds and mist and I got the creepy-crawlies because this guy was being buffeted a little bit by some vertical catabatic winds in the gully. It wasn't looking entirely solid and I waved him off. He couldn't get into position above me and I didn't want him in position above me. I just knew that it was a bad deal to have the Llama go in there at that point. What I didn't know

that the pilot there was the pilot who had pulled off Steven, Nigel and the other Brit over here and spent three days flying really hard at 19,000-20,000 feet at full power on this Llama to pluck these guys off. I didn't know that he was so fatigued and actually past his legal time flying, but I could see in the way he was flying that he was just a little bit rocky and shaky that I did not want him coming to get me.

It got dark. The helicopters went away and the sun set. It was beautiful. I saw three guys come over along the base of my ice chute. I thought maybe they came up and had the intention of climbing up to me. As a matter of fact, at some point during the night I guess I hallucinated that they had actually climbed up to a rock buttress in the snow arena below me and were digging some sort of ledge. I wasn't hallucinating but maybe my vision was hallucinating or something. It felt very certain to me that there were some people 200 feet below me working on this rock buttress, and I felt that they were climbing most of the night and working most of the dawn hours of the morning. It was harder to stay warm that night. There was no cloud cover, no mist. It was chillier. I dropped a mitten and so I just had one mitten and one glove with me at that point. I had some backup liners and things like that but now I had to be extra careful and I also had to do more windmills because I didn't have that insulating layer. So I did more of the same. I did windmills and windmills and windmills and windmills, until I just couldn't do anymore. I would do 20 of them and get so pumped I couldn't lift my arm; and then do 20 with my other arm and then go back and start on 21 with my right arm. I was so pumped, but I was whooped. My mind was together. I wasn't in shock and things were going to be okay.

So, when the sun hit the next morning, the helicopters fired up, the Llama came in pretty early and took one flight up the gully and apparently went down and said, 'get me a 200 foot short-haul rope.' The previous record for short-haul ropes was 100 feet for a human and they said, 'Are you sure?' and Carl and the pilot said, 'Yeah' and so he ties on 200 feet of short-haul rope and clips Billy Shot (?)

into the bottom and takes off from the glacier and they fly off at me. I knew that rescue was imminent because I knew the weather was good. I knew that there was one shot; that they were going to give it 100% and so I unclipped from the anchors behind me and left them clearly visible to the spotter and the helicopter pilot so they knew that I was unclipped and made some hand motions when they inspected to show that I was free. I packed everything on the ledge that had been in my pack and I clipped that to my haul loop with a sling so that could come with me and I broke it loose to make sure it wasn't stuck frozen into the snow and then I cut open the top of Jim's pack with my knife, knowing that my feet were probably frozen in there. I hacked the fabric away with my knife and cut and sawed and hacked and hacked. It was hard because I was bending at my full reach and I was moving my feet for the first time in 44 hours. It was pretty painful. But I wanted them to be free. And then I sort of pulled the fabric away so they weren't covering my toes and then I took my ice axe and sort of hammered at my feet at the plastic shells of the boots so that I knew that there was nothing that was still stuck in there that was going to cause my feet to remain on the ledge while my body was ripped away from it by the helicopter. I had to cut gaiters and things like that and there was blood around, but I got them free and I made this very clear to the helicopter rescue people that I was set to go.

Carl comes flying up with the rescue man on the short-haul. I didn't know who it was. He came straight at me and when he was maybe a couple hundred feet below me he starts coming into the arena and backs off because he saw some mist spilling over and then did another shot and this time brought him right in and touched the rescuer in about 20-30 feet below to my right. This guy scampered right up the slope. I was pleased to see he had Trango tools. He was scampering and had a big grin. Boy, he came up to me and I just gave him a big hug and he gave me a big hug and I said, "Man, I am so glad to see you." I clipped my carabiner, I had a locking carabiner on my harness, clipped that to his ring of biners that he had and made sure it was locked. He kind of looked and he asked me again, to confirm that I was free from the ledge, and I showed him where my

pack was clipped in behind me and he confirmed that I wanted my pack, and I said, 'Yes, I do.' I told him about how much it weighed. He was okay with that. Then he gave the thumbs-up to the helicopter pilot. He pulled up on the collective and we hiked ourselves out of that gorge and it was instant 2500 feet of pretty wild helicopter riding and puts any amusement park bungee jump to shame on this. The helicopter pilot flew me quickly down to the base camp. My feet were just dangling. The pack was not attached. I didn't know if they were bleeding or not. They were still pretty numb. The guy who rescued me looks at me and has this big grin on his face. He says, 'You know who I am?' and I said, 'No.' and he raised his helicopter faceplate and said, 'It's Billy Shot'. And I said, 'Damn!' I hadn't seen Billy Shot in 20 years and this guy is the best short-haul rescue pilot around and to have him come after me was just so good and so important. We gave each other a big hug. So anyway, as we landed, I warned Billy that I didn't have any bracing on my feet and that I would need someone to catch me so he looked at me and told me that his communications were out. It turned out that as he was being landed in the arena below me his communications had started to break up and so he faked it, to pretend that they were still there using hand signals and such as if he couldn't talk for some reason, because he knew that if communications go down that is an automatic abort. He didn't want to leave me there because he knew things were okay and that hand signals were alright.

So anyway, there is a whole host of hands there stretched up to reach me and lower me very gently onto the snow and then put me on a nice warm litter, sleeping bag, mummy bag kind of thing and rolled me into the tent and start to work on me there. It was just so great to be down. I saw my friends down there. Daryl Miller was there, Nick Parker was there, just a bunch of people. It was good to have my own and I knew that those feelings that I had about having people up there on the hill with me had helped me sustain and not get frozen feet.