



BEN

BEN





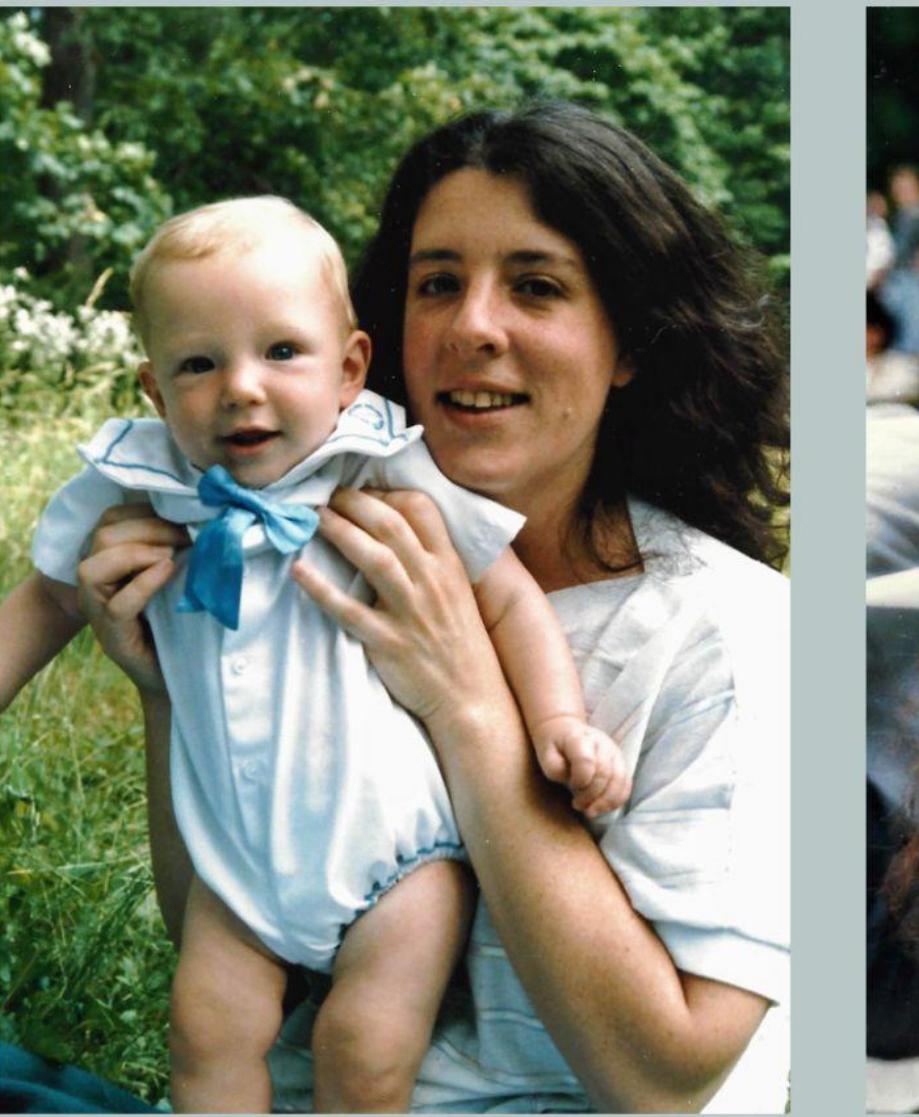
DECEMBER 18, 1985 - SEPTEMBER 20, 2020

Ben Kessel was known for his accomplishments as an engineer, his skill and patience as a teacher, and his inspirational expeditions as a climber and world traveler. His life was characterized by a deep appreciation and respect for nature, knowledge, friends, and family.

Ben joined the MIT Outing Club (MITOC) in January of 2015 for Winter School. Soon, he became a central mentor at the heart of MITOC, leading rock climbing, ice climbing, and hiking trips for students and members of the community, always with an emphasis on environmental stewardship and safety. He held numerous official and informal leadership roles within MITOC over the years, including Intervale Cabin Manager, School of Rock Co-Organizer, and Social Chair. This book was created by Ben's friends and family as a celebration of Ben's life, to recount how deeply and widely he was loved.

MITOC has donated several copies of this book to Ben's family; others reside in the MITOC library and cabins. This book's contents were compiled by Dr. Christina Chang and David Johnson. Family photos were provided by Ben's mom, Irene Kessel, and uncle, Martin Kessel. First printing in September of 2021.

BEN & HIS LOVE OF FAMILY



Irene with Ben at 6 months. Ben is wearing a sailor outfit which was a gift from his great aunt, Phyl.
(June 29, 1986)



Irene with Ben on July 4th on the Esplanade to watch the fireworks.
(1986)



The family at Irene's cousin Carol's wedding.
(Oct. 11, 1987)



Cousin Nathan and brother Dan in front, with Ben in tie-dye, next to older cousins Jesica and Corey.
(Dec. 1990)

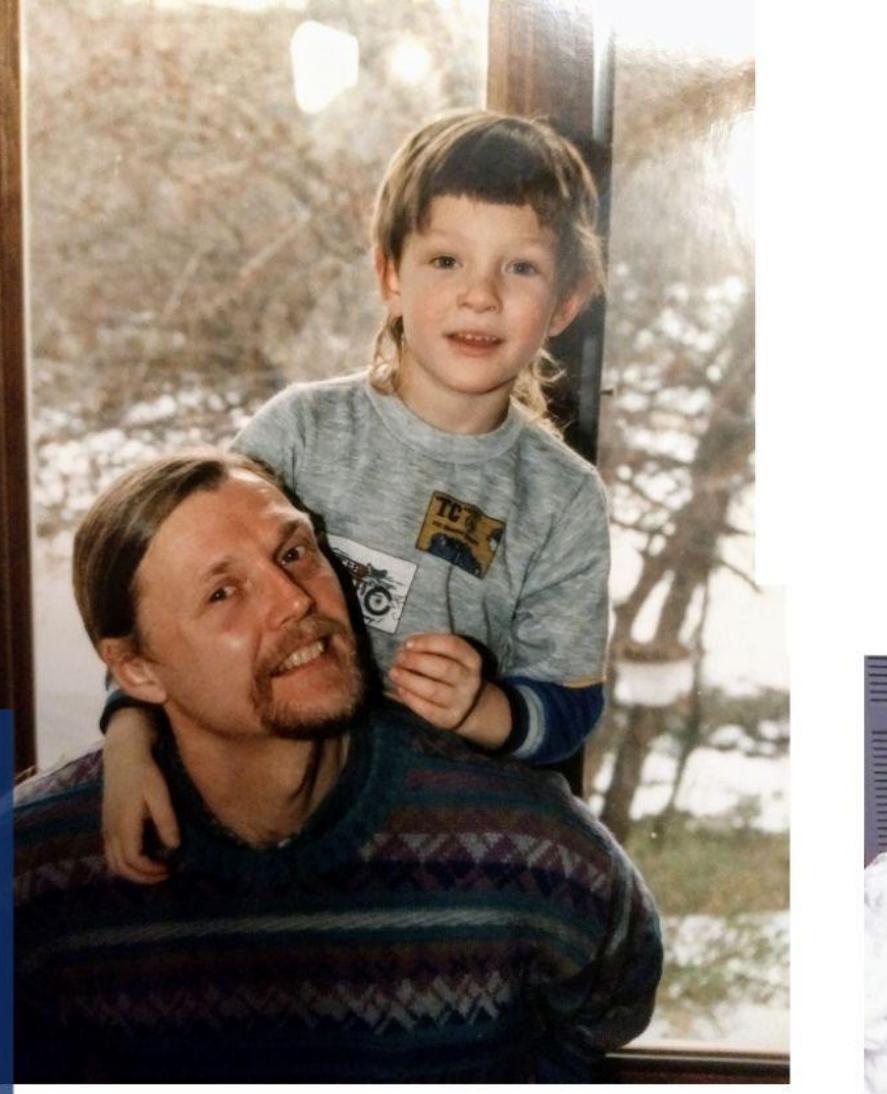


Dan, Nathan & Ben at Make Way for Ducklings statues, in the Boston Public Gardens. Ben's in front, developing his leadership skills.
(Aug. 1991)

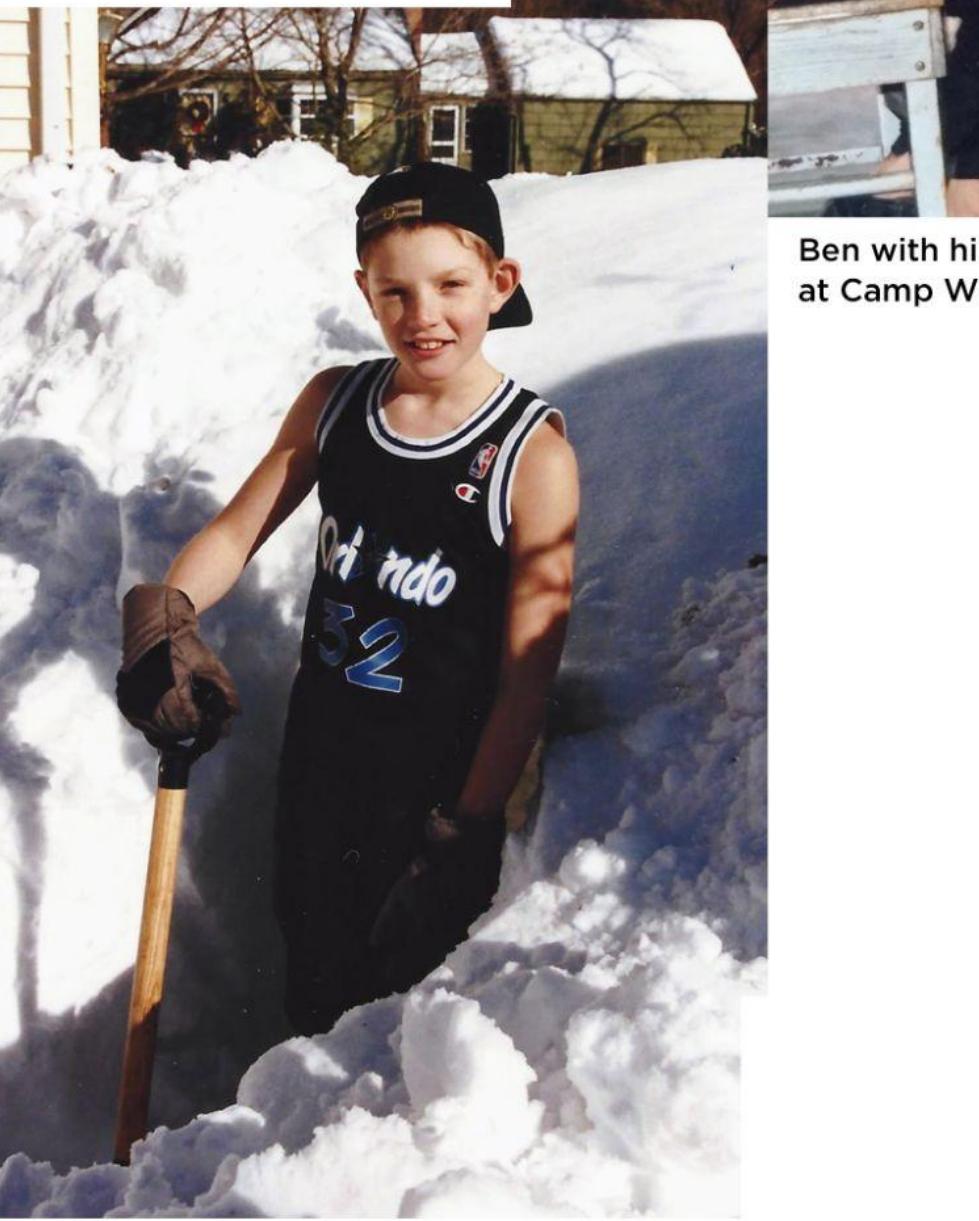
Growing up, I always thought Ben was the coolest person on Earth. He had a jungle gym in his room, and he won every game of Risk, and he made blue and orange seem like the coolest color combination imaginable.

I got so much inspiration and direction from him in my own life, whether it was learning how to repair computers, going to engineering school, or traveling to Vietnam, buying a motorbike off Craigslist, and driving throughout the country. He was just such an inspiration for how to learn and how to live life to the fullest. He will be an inspiration to me for my whole life.

- Nathan Kessel



Ben with Paul.



Ben helping shovel snow.
(Feb. 1996)



Ben with his younger brother Dan
at Camp Wildwood.



Ben loved being Superman - his mom had to buy 3 identical Superman outfits because that's all he wanted to wear. He absolutely loved having the cape that attached at the shoulders with Velcro. At one point, they didn't have a cape, and his Mom gave him a dishtowel, because he had to have a cape!
(Fall 1989)



Ben (center) with cousin Nathan (left), and his brother Dan (right), who both looked up to him. Here, Ben is taking them to school on their first day of kindergarten.
(Sept. 1, 1995)



Ben, Dan and Nathan on a jungle gym.
(Sept. 1995)

Our son Nathan never had brothers and sisters, but he did have a big cousin who led the way for him.

When Ben was very little, Irene decided he would be happier when he came to our house if we had a playroom. So she took over a room in our tiny house and created a beautiful playroom, and it was lots of fun. Once we had the playroom, all we needed was our own child – and eventually the playroom became Nathan's room.

A few years later... I have a picture of the first day of school. Nathan and Dan were just starting kindergarten, and Ben, in fourth grade, is holding Nathan's hand, showing him the way.

When Nathan got to high school, as soon as Nathan's teachers saw the name Kessel, they remembered Ben, and Nathan had high standards to live up to.

Natick built a new high school, which included a new lab for the A+ computer program. On the door was a list of all those who had successfully completed the program — and it wasn't a very long list – but it included Ben and Nathan Kessel.

Ben went on to engineering school – the first person in the family to do so since his grandfather after whom he was named. And Nathan did so too.

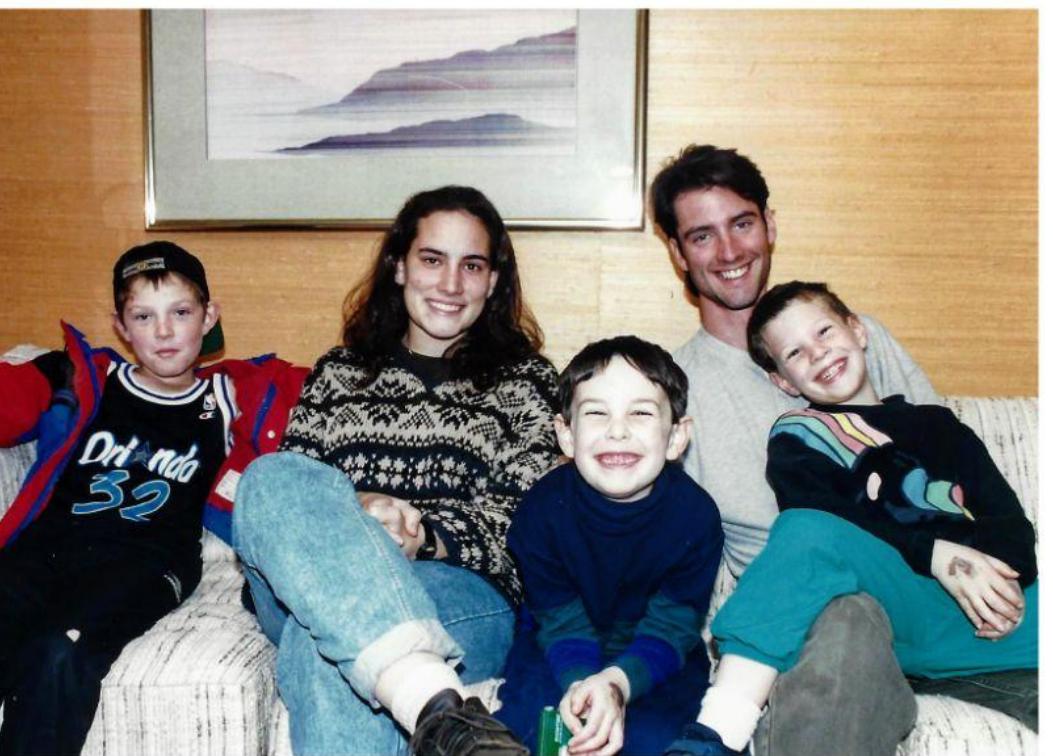
Finally, I was in awe when Ben set off by himself on a year-long trip around the world. A few years later, Nathan went on a seven-month trip to Southeast Asia, getting many ideas from that portion of Ben's trip.

I think Ben's life will continue to inspire us.

- Martin Kessel



Irene with her sons, Dan and Ben.
(Thanksgiving 1995)



The cousins: Ben, Jesica, Nathan, Corey and Dan.
(Thanksgiving 1995)

...I hope that I can use my words to share some of the warmth that Cousin Ben brought to my family.

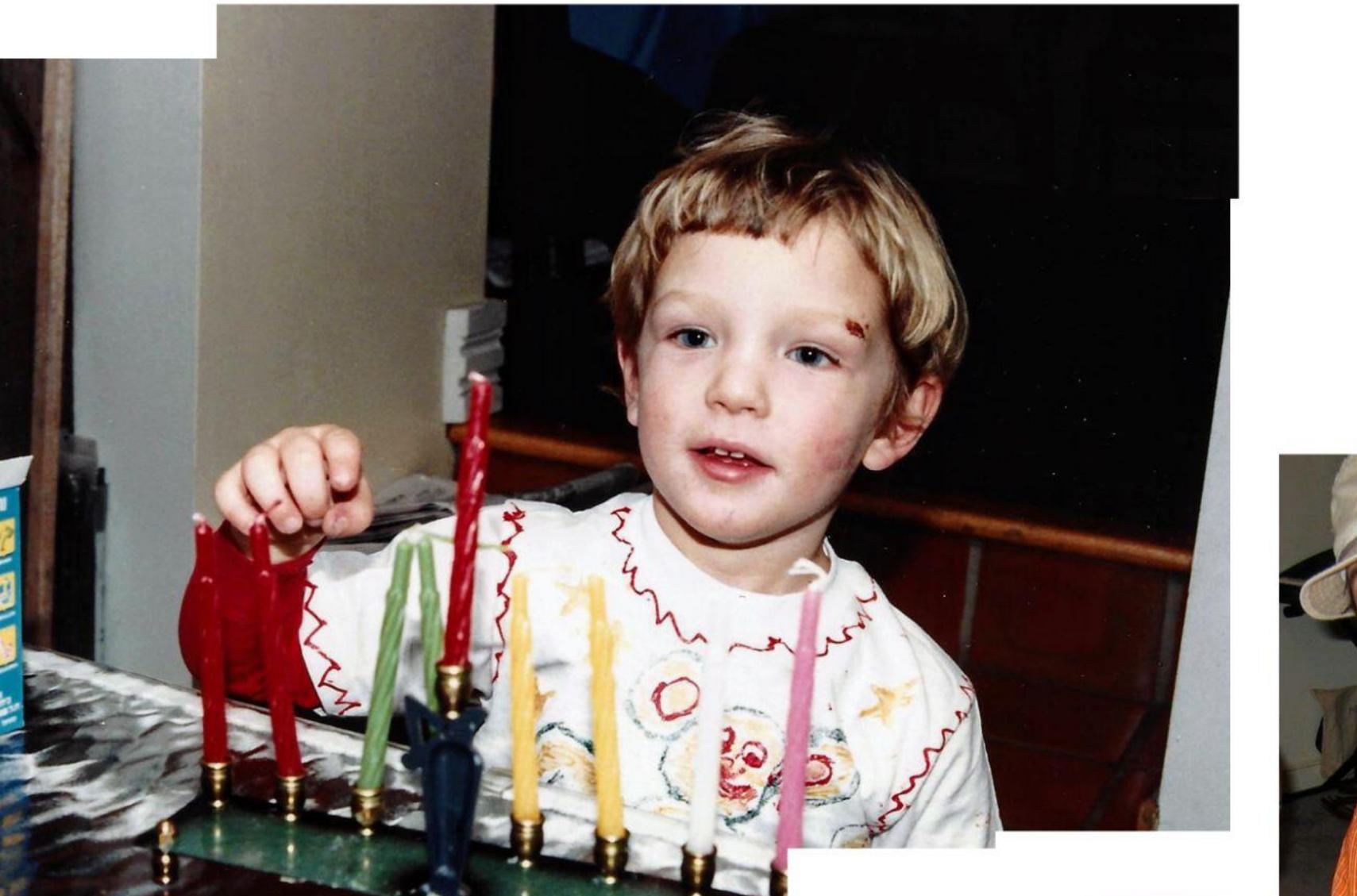
We were lucky to spend brief snippets of time with Ben through the years at family celebrations. It was always fun to see how much he grew and changed from one Bat Mitzvah to the next. At our first celebrations, he was the observant, baseball cap wearing, interesting boy cousin. By the time of our last celebration, many years later, he was a wonderfully personable, adventurous, young man.

We have treasured memories of him staying with us in London. We had great admiration for his spirit of adventure and willingness to explore new horizons. The last time we saw him in London he was eager to go with Erica to meet and talk with new people at our local pub, Ben brought a kind and peaceful energy to the room - a Kessel legacy.

We will always carry our love for him and his family and we hope to keep alive his spirit of caring and inquisitiveness. He will remain with us in our enjoyment of nature.

May his memory be a blessing.

- Hank Udow and Gina Pitchon, on behalf of my mother, Bette Pitchon; my sisters, Mindy Spitz (Chuck) and Marcy Schroder (Alan); my brother, Howard Pitchon (Kay); and all of our children - Erica, Daniel, Sarah, Hilary, Jonathan, and Harrison. We are all Ben's cousins.



Irene used to let Ben and Dan choose the colors of the Hanukkah candles and put them in the Menorah. It gave them a part in the ceremony - they always looked forward to choosing the colors.
(Hanukkah, 1988)



Ben and Nathan lighting Hanukkah candles.
(Dec. 19, 2003)

BEN AT HIS BAR MITZVAH (MAY 25, 1999)



Ben is 13 years old.

At his Bar Mitzvah, a boy becomes a man, and takes the responsibilities of a man in the Jewish community. The most significant one is to chant aloud in Hebrew a part of the Torah he has prepared.

Irene desired that Ben maintain this connection with his Jewish heritage, but knew that the Bar Mitzvah is no small commitment. She offered him a present if he would do a Bar Mitzvah. She gave him the choice between having a huge hotel-rental Bar Mitzvah party or his own computer. It worked, and he got a computer, which was a big deal in 1997!



The tall cousins - Dan, Ben, Nathan, Corey.
(Thanksgiving 2006)

Ben knew how to be present in the moment, and to enjoy the company of family and friends around him, sometimes quietly, sometimes gregariously. When I saw Ben in an indoor gathering, he could be measured, meaning watching and listening more than talking. In those moments I saw him as more content than reserved. Ben loved being with his family and gave them space to simply just be together and with each other.

- Marco Kaltofen



Seated: Ben, Dan, and Nathan.
Standing: Aunt Bev and Uncle Martin,
Jesica, Aunt Terry, Irene, and Corey.
(Nov. 22, 2013)

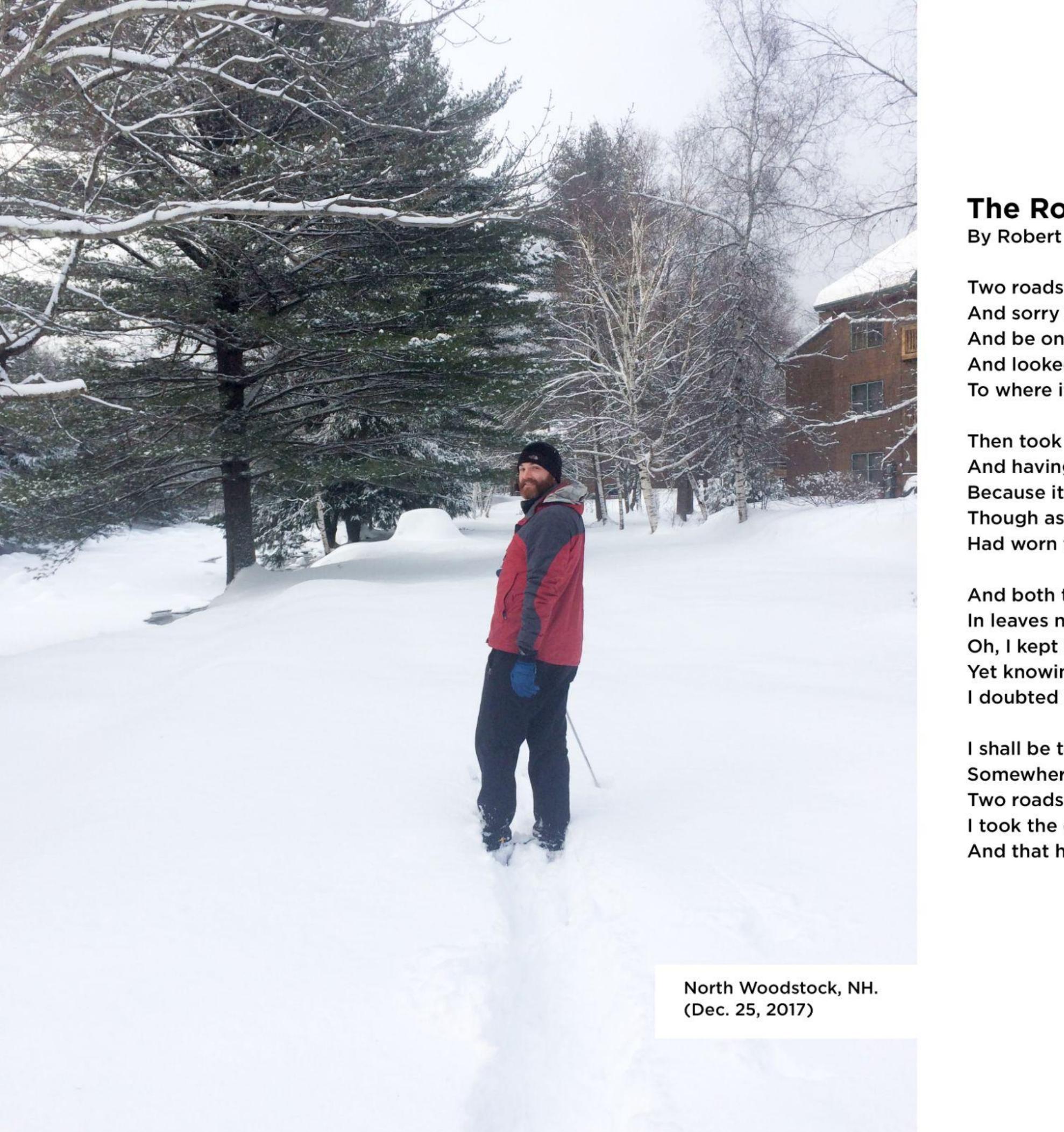


Nathan, Ben and Corey.
(Thanksgiving 2015)



Nathan, Martin and Bev, Dan, Irene, Ben and Eleni in Bethlehem, NH.
(Sept. 3, 2017)





North Woodstock, NH.
(Dec. 25, 2017)

The Road Not Taken

By Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.



XC Skiing
(2016)



Ben and Eleni
(July 21, 2018)



Ben is, has, and always will be my brother... but that's a mixed bag, as anyone with a sibling may know... Ben was not a very nice brother when we were kids, he was troubled, and lashed, often in a very cruel manner... I'm thankful he eventually grew out of it, but he took his time... and it hurt...

But he was always my big bro, if he thought something was cool, so did I. Good or bad, I looked to him... and I hear others did too.

Some years ago at a family get-together, Ben opened his arms and gestured for a hug, for the first time I could recall, he was inviting me - for one, physical contact, and two, connection... I can still recall when he would put anyone in a headlock who tried to touch his hat... so this was a big deal to me.

One of my greatest desires growing up was for a loving relationship with my brother, and he took his sweet time to get there, but it was clear that he was trying.

Eventually we found that we were on the same page about one thing, climbing. It's the one thing that we both loved and shared, and enjoyed doing together...

I feel like I just started getting to know the man, we were just beginning to really connect... I'm gonna miss him... but I will never forget him.

I love you Ben.

- Dan Kessel



BEN & HIS LONG-LASTING FRIENDSHIPS

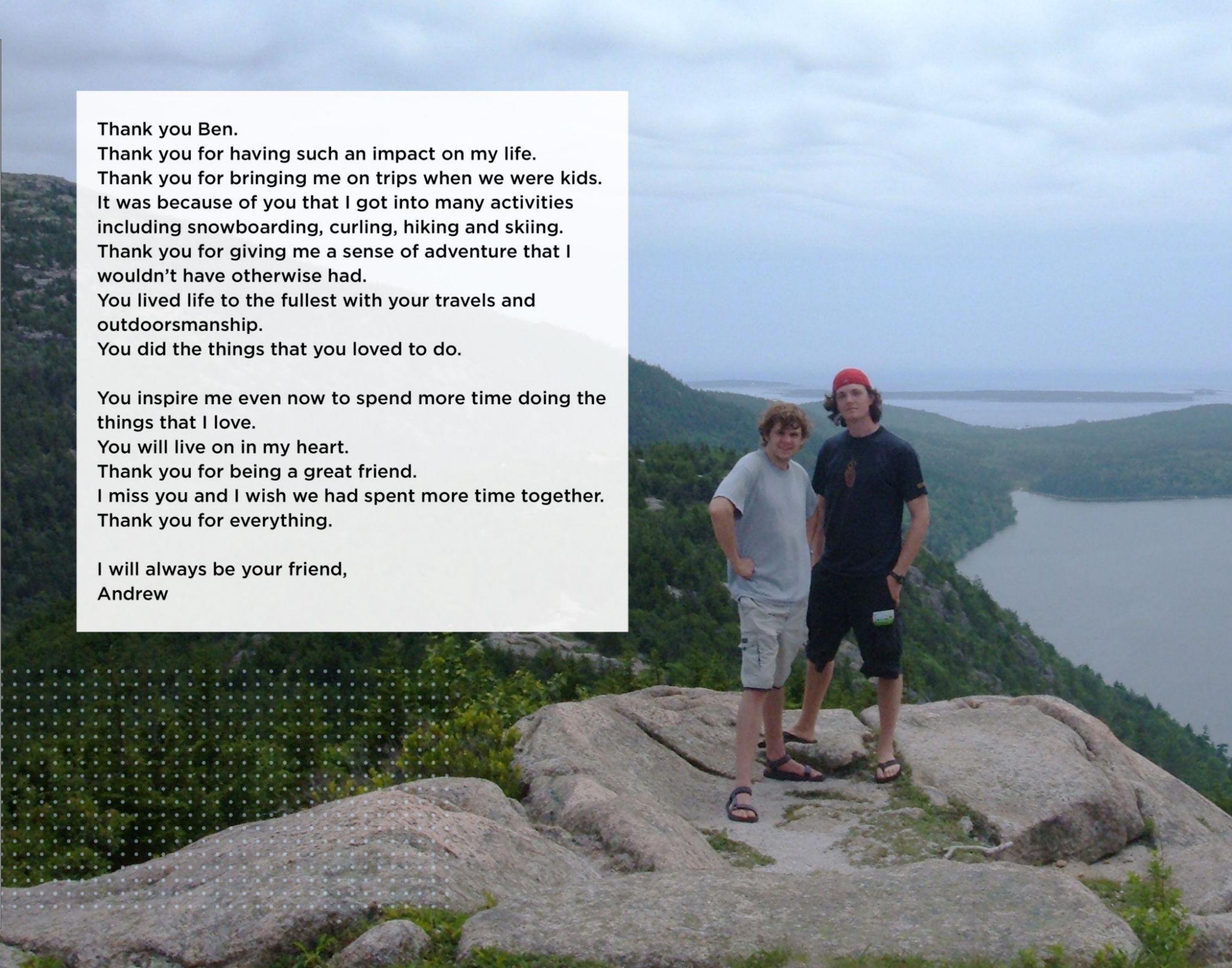


An early science fair project on Probability that Paul helped Ben make. His teacher is Mrs. Sutherland and on the right is pictured his best friend for life, Tom Pappas.

Tom is Ben's earliest best friend that he maintained his whole life. They met in 1st grade. Ben was always a deeply loyal friend.



Home in Natick with some high school best friends: Brian, Tom, Cathy (Tom's sister), Costas and Andrew (Nick not pictured).



Thank you Ben.

Thank you for having such an impact on my life.
Thank you for bringing me on trips when we were kids.
It was because of you that I got into many activities
including snowboarding, curling, hiking and skiing.
Thank you for giving me a sense of adventure that I
wouldn't have otherwise had.

You lived life to the fullest with your travels and
outdoorsmanship.

You did the things that you loved to do.

You inspire me even now to spend more time doing the
things that I love.

You will live on in my heart.

Thank you for being a great friend.

I miss you and I wish we had spent more time together.
Thank you for everything.

I will always be your friend,
Andrew



I grew up with Ben. I have known Ben for, really, as long as I can remember. We spent many a snow day together, many a camping trip together, we went to summer camp together, we curled together.

I remember the coffee house, and Friendly's, and trips in the car. We would devour Belgian waffle sundaes.

He's just so formative for me, and I remember a lot of good times and growing and learning with him, and with Irene and Dan.

- Dan Moran

From L to R: Andrew, Tom Pappas, Nick Lenci, Anonymous, Brian, and Ben.



Nick Lenci (front left, next to Ben in above photo), one of Ben's best friends from high school, gets married to Madeeha Mehmoor. (Sept. 8, 2018)



He's the closest thing to a brother I will ever have. I am glad he could be at our wedding as a groomsman.

- Nick Lenci

Ben walking down the aisle, the bride's sister, Neelum Mehmoor.





Ben with Cherie at Natick Community Organic Farm.
(May 19, 2002)



Ben and Cherie at his college graduation from
University of the Pacific.
(2009)



Ben and Cherie skating at Franconia Inn, New Hampshire.
(Dec. 29, 2010)

There are a lot of things that I could say about Ben; he has had a huge impact on my life. I could talk about our travels, about college, or curling, or any number of things. But I decided instead to share the aspects of Ben that are most important to me, even though those things are hard to talk about.

Ben came into my life pretty early, we were both 13 when we met. He lived in Massachusetts, I lived in New York. But we had a deep connection, even at that young age. We talked for hours, pretty much everyday, about anything. He was always open, he would always listen to me, he was always there for me. I didn't come from a very loving family, to put it mildly. But Ben did, and because Irene, Paul, and Martin and Bev gave him so much love, he was able to share it with me.

Which is what he wants, now, for all of us. He loves all of us. I know that my whole life is better for having him in it. I have a family too now, a husband and a daughter. Ben is there, with her, every day because he taught me how to be a loving person. And I will always love him, and he will always be in my heart. His impact on the world will be everlasting, because I will teach my daughter what Ben taught me, and she will teach her family. And that is how I will think of Ben, for the rest of my life.

- Cherie

BEN & HIS LOVE OF FOOD



He was at Aunt Terry's house in Virginia, enjoying Chinese noodles using chopsticks.
(Dec. 1987)



Ben helping his Mom prepare an apple pie for Thanksgiving.
(Nov. 1988)



Ben and Eleni finished the W trek on Torres del Paine and journeyed to El Calafate, where they enjoyed a traditional Argentinian meat dish with Malbec wine.

Ben loved food. He would be the first person to start hovering around the food table before a lunch & learn, and he would take home any uneaten food at the end of an energy bar. He was the captain of the unofficial Greentown “vulture squad” and never let good food go to waste. On more than one occasion, he brought home forgotten food that had been left in the refrigerators and would have otherwise been thrown out. You could always find Ben in the 28 Dane kitchen going through the refrigerator the day before a fridge cleaning.

Ben had a wonderful, dry, sarcastic sense of humor. Nearly everything he said had some hidden, subtle joke behind it, and his deadpan executing was perfect. He was definitely in the running for the funniest person at Greentown.

Ben was one of the pillars of the community that made the old Greentown such a fun place to work and hang out. He was often one of the last people to leave events like town halls and energy bars, which at the time would routinely run late into the night and into the early morning. He was also an active participant in the pool ladder and monthly pool tournament, usually ranking near the top.

- Russel McAvoy



Ben always loved waffles. Anyone mentored by him knew to order waffles at the B-Side Diner in New Paltz.
Photo credit Cole Crawford.
(May 14, 2020)

BEN & HIS HUMOR



Dressed as James Bond while visiting London.
(May 30, 2009)



Nick and Ben (back) with Haiyan, Fiona, Cole, Abby and Anna. Halloween in Cambridge.
(Oct. 31, 2018)



Ben, when asked if he knew any magic tricks. In the
Sunrise Shack in Glen, NH. Ana Beglova at left.
Photo credit Haiyan Xu.
(Nov. 24, 2019)

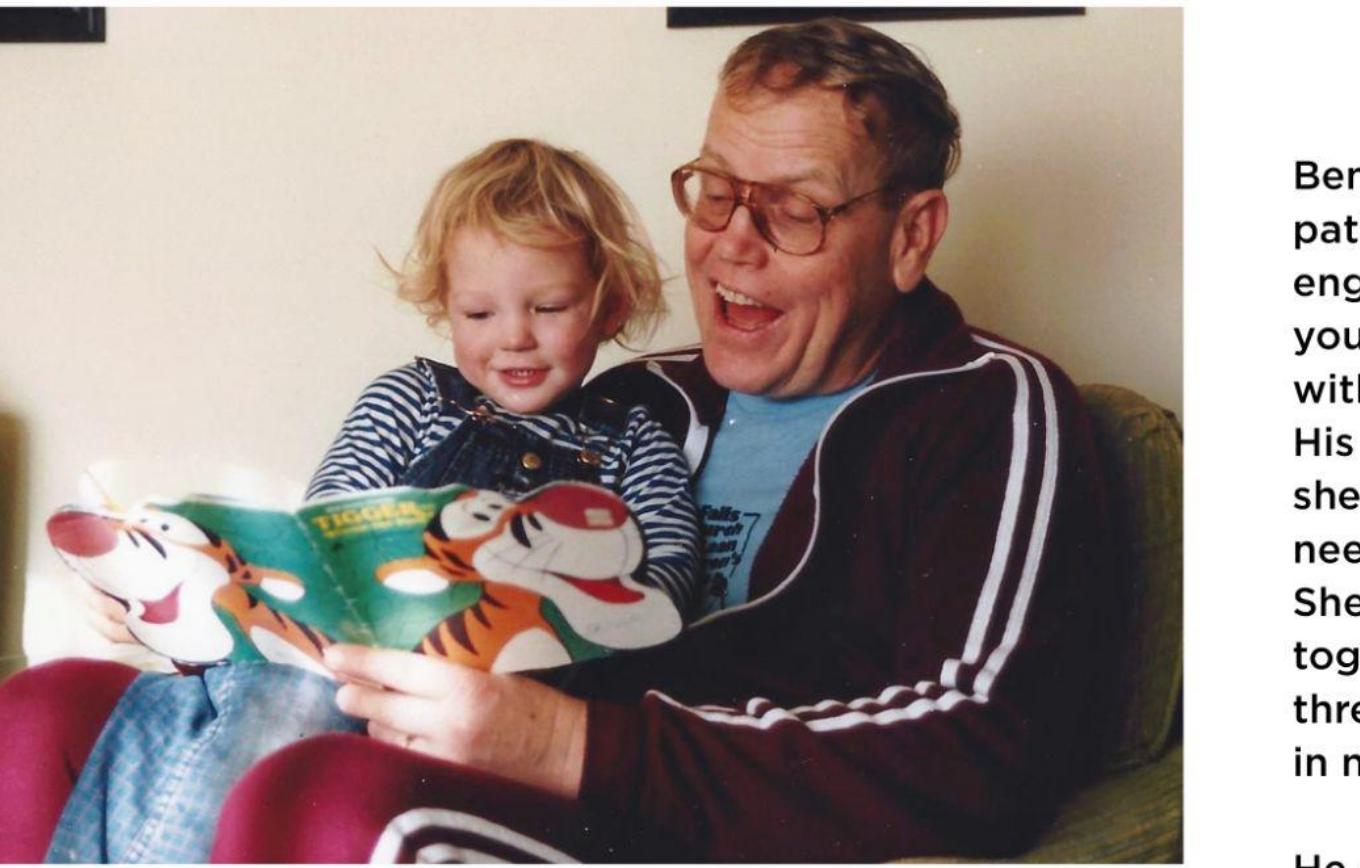


Photo from Jill's story at right.
Photo credit Chen Lu.
(Dec. 31, 2018)

On December 31st, 2018, Ben, Eleni, Haiyan, Chen, and I sat in Ben and Eleni's cozy living room. We ate dinner and had delicious wine as we sat together talking about past and future outdoor adventures. I remember we looked at a slideshow of one of Ben's recent excursions. He lit up when talking about his tales of exploration, and I felt inspired to make some of my own memories. I remember spending much more time outside that following year than I probably ever had, and I have to credit that to Ben's stories and his enthusiasm for the outdoors. I also remember Ben sharing how his family used to make hats out of newspaper to ring in the New Year. This wasn't something I'd ever done and I felt like I learned so much about Ben in the way he shared with us all how to fold the paper and the fun we all had with something so simple. With that gesture of connection and celebration, Ben helped make a happy memory out of the last day of what was a tough year for me. I'll never forget it. Thank you, Ben.

- Jill Murphy

BEN'S LOVE OF LEARNING & ENGINEERING



Ben always loved being read to. Here his great uncle, Soop, is reading a Tigger book to Ben.
(Dec. 1987)



Ben, always an engineer, loved building things.

Ben appeared to have already chosen his path in life as a toddler. He was clearly an engineer and a climber – always. As a very young child he especially loved playing with all kinds of construction toys. His mother remembers an incident when she gave a friend an ice cream maker that needed to be assembled before using. She couldn't figure out how to put it together, nor could her friend, but three-year-old Benjamin put it together in no time.

He spent a lot of time at the public library, where he would ask his mother to read him one book after another – he could never get enough. She had to resort to a routine of taking him to the nearby ice cream shop to pry him away from the books – how could he leave without finishing every last book about spiders – and what about all the other creatures, places and people out there to learn about!? What joy his mother was blessed with to witness this little “live wire” mature and mellow into the calm, focused, gentle man he became.

A college recommendation letter.

November 22, 2003

I have known Ben for many years, and I have had him as a student in electronics, honors physics and Advanced Placement physics. Ben is a young man of remarkable talent in science, a deeply thoughtful observer of life, and a pleasant, easy-going personality.

In honors physics, Ben's grades do not reflect the level of understanding he had for the material. He had little patience for activities that he felt did not further his mastery of the subject, but was well-prepared for quizzes, and was at the top of his section on the midyear exam. His labs demonstrated good understanding, and his grades suffered mostly for details he considered unimportant.

I have noticed a great deal of maturation in Ben this year. Advanced Placement physics has proven a good match for his skills and ambitions. In addition to faring very well with the material, which is a strong indication of his ability and motivation, Ben is better integrated into the class, showing a much greater tolerance and patience with his classmates and lab partners.

Ben's work in the lab is also far better this year. He spends time discussing lab setup with his group, and often brings a creative, confident flair to the work. For instance, he convinced his group to add extra weights to a complex torque lab this

week, and it is a measure of their confidence that they agreed, and it is a measure of their ability that they won the competition to predict the unknown tension forces.

In electronics, Ben is not only a knowledgeable and careful circuit craftsman, he takes an interest in how the other students are doing, and is very generous with his time and skill in helping them to learn and succeed in the course. This is a talent that Ben has, and I am pleased to see him use this strength more this year than before.

I enjoy spending time with Ben, and conversations with him are often an exercise in keeping up with his keen intellect and diverse set of interests. We have been rock climbing together several times, and he brings the same calm confidence, backed with solid skills to climbing as he does to academics.

I have seen Ben grow into a capable, motivated scholar and a sociable, well-liked classmate. He has a strong social conscience and unshakeable integrity, coupled with a sly, inventive sense of humor. He has the ability and motivation to succeed, and an inner strength that few his age have achieved. I recommend him enthusiastically.

Joel E. Bradford
Physics Teacher
Natick High School

I knew Ben in graduate school at Stanford. We were in the same course of study and then also the same lab doing experiments on engines.

Our advisor gave him the name Gentle Ben. Ben was extremely smart, extremely kind. Our professor said he didn't believe in anyone having to work on a project alone, so Ben and I were assigned to the same engine. It was many days working really hard trying to figure things out. He was always very steady and would try to bring a sense of humor to things, when they were really challenging or hard to figure out.

He was also such a kind person to anyone around him. It was something I always noticed and admired. He could talk to anyone and make friends with them.

We were all Stanford nerds and didn't go outside much, but he would tell us, "Okay, we're going to hike Half Dome tonight. Don't worry, I have all the gear, we're going, this is exactly what we're going to do." And he'd have it all planned out, so we'd say, "Okay!" We always felt so safe and cared for. His enthusiasm for outdoor activities and other things we passively learned by being around him, that is all stuff I've carried with me.

My colleague that I still work with is from the same lab, and he wanted me to share that we'd sorted our lab into Hogwarts Houses, from Harry Potter, and Ben was in Gryffindor because of his bravery. That was noteworthy among his peers. We recognized that.

- Julie Blumreiter



Cathedral Peak Eichorn's Pinnacle.
(2013)



Capitol Reef National Park, Utah.
(2015)

...I met Ben 6 years ago when he, believe it or not, volunteered to help us develop our first product at CoolChip Technologies. At the time, we were very short on cash and Ben was eager to prove himself. He did such a good job that we brought him in full time as soon as we were able to raise a little bit of cash.

For those of you that did not know Ben in a professional setting, he was great engineer and the person I've worked with the closest with during my career. We were basically a two-man team for the better part of the last 6 years, first at CoolChip where Ben and I were the company's R&D team and then for the past 3 years at Ivenix where Ben and I were the company's Control Systems team. As our principal test engineer at CoolChip, Ben was instrumental in developing and launching our very first product. As a Control Systems Engineer at Ivenix, Ben helped develop the company's core technology that measures and controls the delivery of IV medications, making infusions much safer for critically ill patients.

What made Ben such a great engineer and person to work with was that, in addition to being just so incredibly smart and knowledgeable, he had this ability to understand what we were trying to accomplish, figure out without any hand-holding what needed to be done to get there, and then teach himself whatever skills were needed along the way. One thing that was particularly unique and valuable about Ben was how much he hated to repeat any task more than a couple of times and how that motivated him to figure out ways to automate any repetitive process - whether a test sequence in the lab, computer simulations, or creating algorithms to parse through thousands of lines of data to extract the information that we would otherwise have to extract manually. At Ivenix, he was known for his immense depth and breadth of knowledge of all things engineering while at the same time being so humble and down to earth. He would frequently quietly offer a proposed solution to a problem at hand, and just casually explain all the theoretical calculations needed to support the suggestion....

I enjoyed watching his reaction every time I offered him a slice of pizza with mushrooms (I learned from Ben that mushrooms are not real food - they are fungus and not edible). I'll miss joking with him about the sixth sense that he had about finding free food in the kitchen before anyone else even knew that free food was available (he was well known for that).

On behalf of his colleagues at Ivenix, we will all miss all our conversations during lunch or Thirsty Thursday describing Ben's previous or upcoming adventures around the world....We loved his quiet charm, brilliant contributions, and laid-back style. We will make sure that Ben's presence remains with us at Ivenix moving forward. One of the key algorithms that Ben developed for calibrating all our pumps as they are manufactured will now become the Kessel Function and will get hard-coded that way into the firmware. We will also be putting up a picture with a plaque in remembrance of Ben near the cafeteria window which was Ben's favorite spot, where he would take snack breaks while watching the scenery.

- Lino Gonzalez



Ben in the Advanced Energy System Laboratory, Stanford University.
(2015)



The Kessel Function

Ben was a core part of the Ivenix engineering team and contributed to the development of its infusion system in many ways. One of the projects he worked on was to refine how they calibrate the pump during manufacturing to ensure that it always delivers fluid accurately. The Ivenix pump uses pneumatic pressure to draw fluid in from a bag and push it out to the patient. The measurement and control system is based on ideal gas laws which dictate that any change in the volume of a gas results in a proportional change in pressure. The trick was that the calculations they were doing assumed a contact temperature which was not true in actual practice. The difference between assumption and reality resulted in errors in flow output, but the root cause of the problem was not immediately obvious.

Ben dug in and approached the challenge with a mix of creative problem solving and very deep knowledge of physics. He determined that there was a temperature differential between two portions of the pneumatic system and further determined how the ambient temperature of the surroundings during pump calibration affected the internal temperatures. In the end he worked this knowledge all down to a temperature compensation calculation that is used during calibration. After implementation, this compensation function fully resolved the flow errors they had been seeing, and that calculation is used to calibrate every pump they build. His work to solve this problem was a major contribution Ben was known for, and his intuition to look into an aspect of the problem that others hadn't thought of resulted in this innovation.

To honor this contribution and his memory, Ivenix has officially named the temperature compensation calculation the "Kessel function" in both its design documentation as well as the software itself.

- Ben Powers and Lino Gonzalez

The CoolChip guys are awesome - as Community Director, you couldn't ask for a better team. They were respectful users of the shared incubator space, active attendees of community events, and always willing to lend a tool or piece of advice to others. Ben was one of my go-to Greentown members. He was a smart, hands-on engineer. If I ever needed something moved or fixed or borrowed, I knew I could always walk up to his desk and ask for a hand - which he would oblige with a smile on his face. Ben was an exemplary embodiment of Greentown's community values, helping the community and giving back was something he always had time for.

I don't remember if Ben or CoolChip ever won the "Night Owl" community award...but if not, he definitely could have. Ben was incredibly hardworking and dedicated. He often spent late nights in the office and lab finishing up projects or reports. It was not uncommon to see him taking a nap on the green couch in the middle of the day to catch up on sleep. Even if you couldn't see his face, you would know it was him by the same Vans he wore everyday :)

Although he was a quiet guy, a lot of people got to know Ben through Greentown community events. He was a staple at most of them. I also remember Ben being a staple at "Vulture Island" - the loving given name of the kitchen island in 28 Dane Street where leftovers were sent to be picked over by hungry entrepreneurs. For me, he was the member I could always ask to help connect a new keg to the finicky home-made kegerator or move tables and chairs around after all the attendees had left. Many times, post event cleanup, we would head to the roof with the last few folks and share one final beer before heading home.

The day CoolChip closed up shop at Greentown was a sad one. It was always sad when members moved out, but I knew I would miss the CoolChip team a lot. In true community spirit, Ben managed the move and donation of a lot of lab equipment and components to other Greentown companies and the newly established Greentown Electronics Lab at 28 Dane Street. Fortunately, Ben's love of Greentown events meant that we would see him at Energy Bar networking events regularly. In fact, the last time I saw Ben was at the Energy Bar in March 2020. Even though neither of us had worked at Greentown in a few years, it was no surprise to see his smiling face walking up to me in the event space. We elbow bumped and chatted for a bit....

Ben, your friendship has meant so much to me.

- Liz Barno



Ben was a valued member of our community since 2014, when CoolChip Technologies joined Greentown Labs. Although it's been a few years since CoolChip left Greentown, Ben remained an active member of the community and was known for showing up at EnergyBar or other community events.

During his time at Greentown Labs, you could find Ben mostly tinkering in the lab, taking a midday nap or searching for food at events. Ben was known by other community members as an amazing engineer, who played a key role in CoolChip products and was always happy to lend a hand to others on their projects. In true Greentown spirit, Ben always ensured leftover food from events and the community would not be wasted, often bringing home forgotten food that would have otherwise been thrown out.

Ben will be remembered for his "wonderful, dry, sarcastic sense of humor" and as a pillar of the community that made Greentown such a fun place to work and hang out. He was often one of the last people to leave events like Town Halls and EnergyBars, and he was also an active participant in the pool ladder and monthly pool tournament, usually ranking near the top. In his free time, Ben loved engaging in outdoor activities, traveling around the world, and was also known for his unique experience competing in curling.

- Greentown Labs team,
including Andrew Takacs, Russel McAvoy, Cayman Somerville and Liz Barno

BEN & HIS LOVE OF TRAVEL



Ben was happiest on the go in the backpack on his Mom's back.
Here they are in the Airport in Park City, Utah.
(Jan. 1987)

They travelled, shopped, skied, and hiked together,
all with Ben loving being inside that backpack.



Killington Vermont, at a vacation house.
Aunt Terry claims Ben climbed into the sink!
(Apr. 1987)



(Summer of 1986)

Mariché was Ben's au pair from Sanlucar de Barrameda in Spain. Here they are together at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

Ben would come with Irene everywhere,
including when she would tour performing
guitar with Mandala Folk Dance ensemble,
a folk dance performing group based in the
Boston area. Mariché would hold Ben on her
lap in the audience.

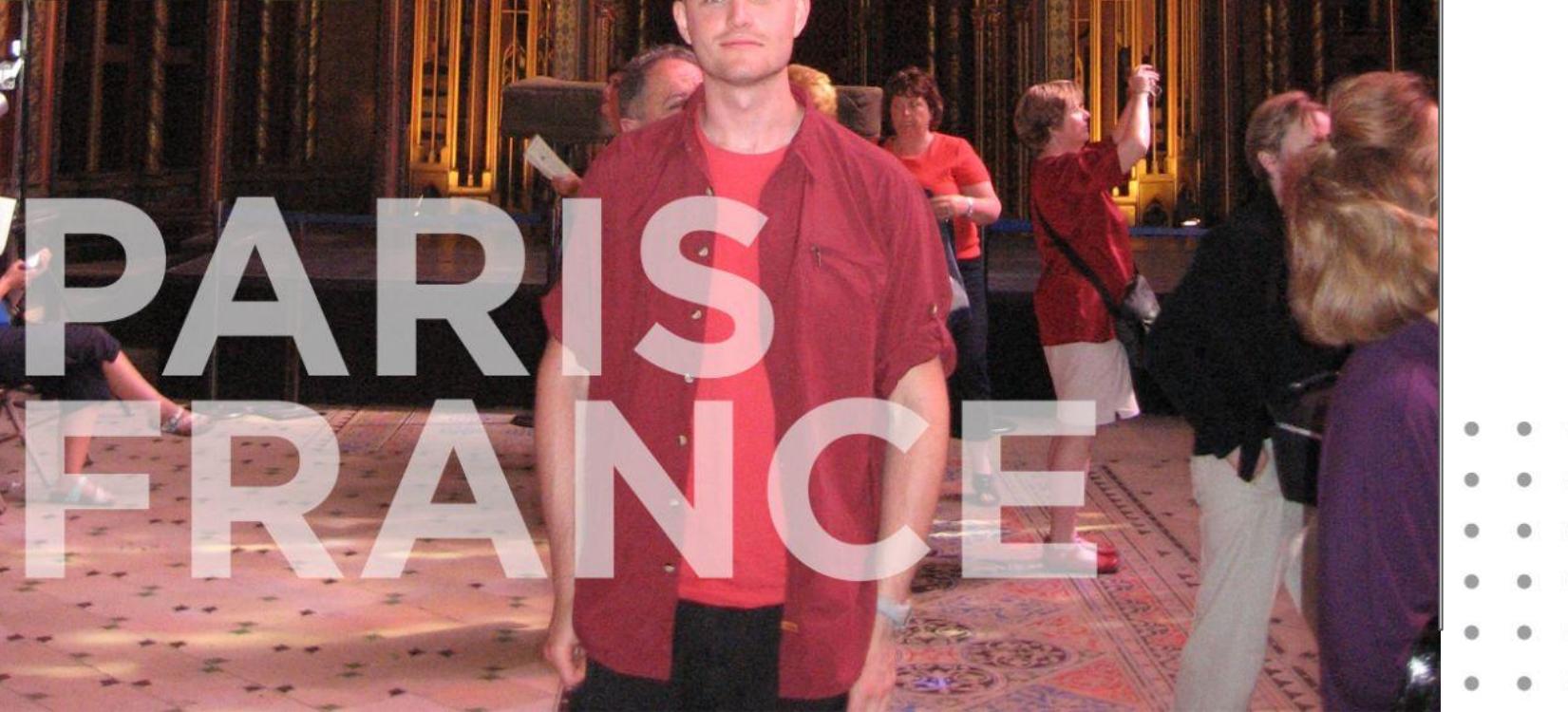
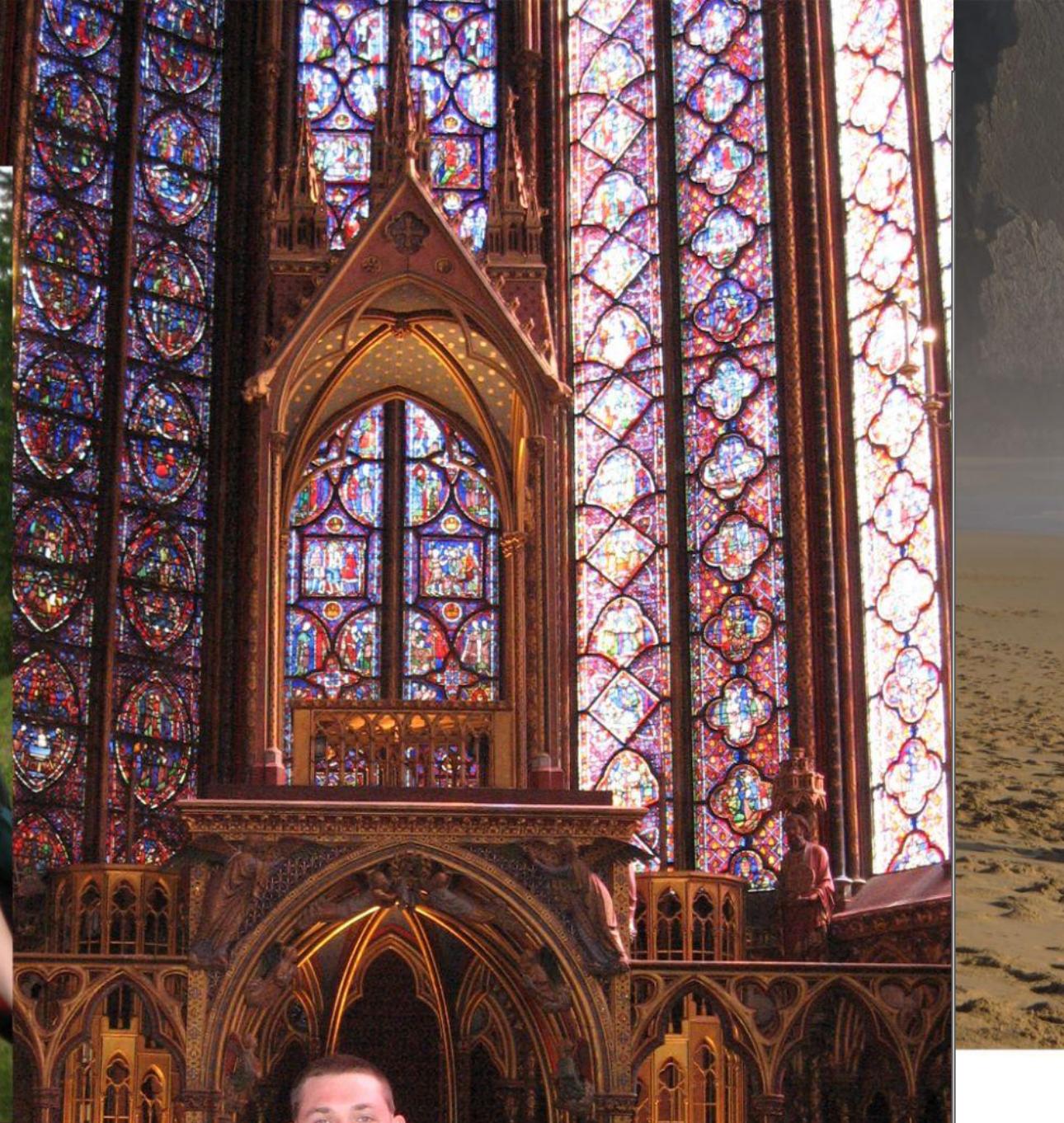


Ben's first trip to the Alps with his
mom/Irene, Aunt Terry and cousin Jesica.
(Austria)



Napping on the train.

INNSBRUCK AUSTRIA



PARIS FRANCE

Sainte-Chapelle.



Ben returning from his first surfing lesson with Molly, his surfing instructor, and Dan.



At Cabo da Roca, the westernmost point of Europe, with Irene's friend, Denise, who the family was visiting at their home in Cascais, north of Lisbon.







London
England



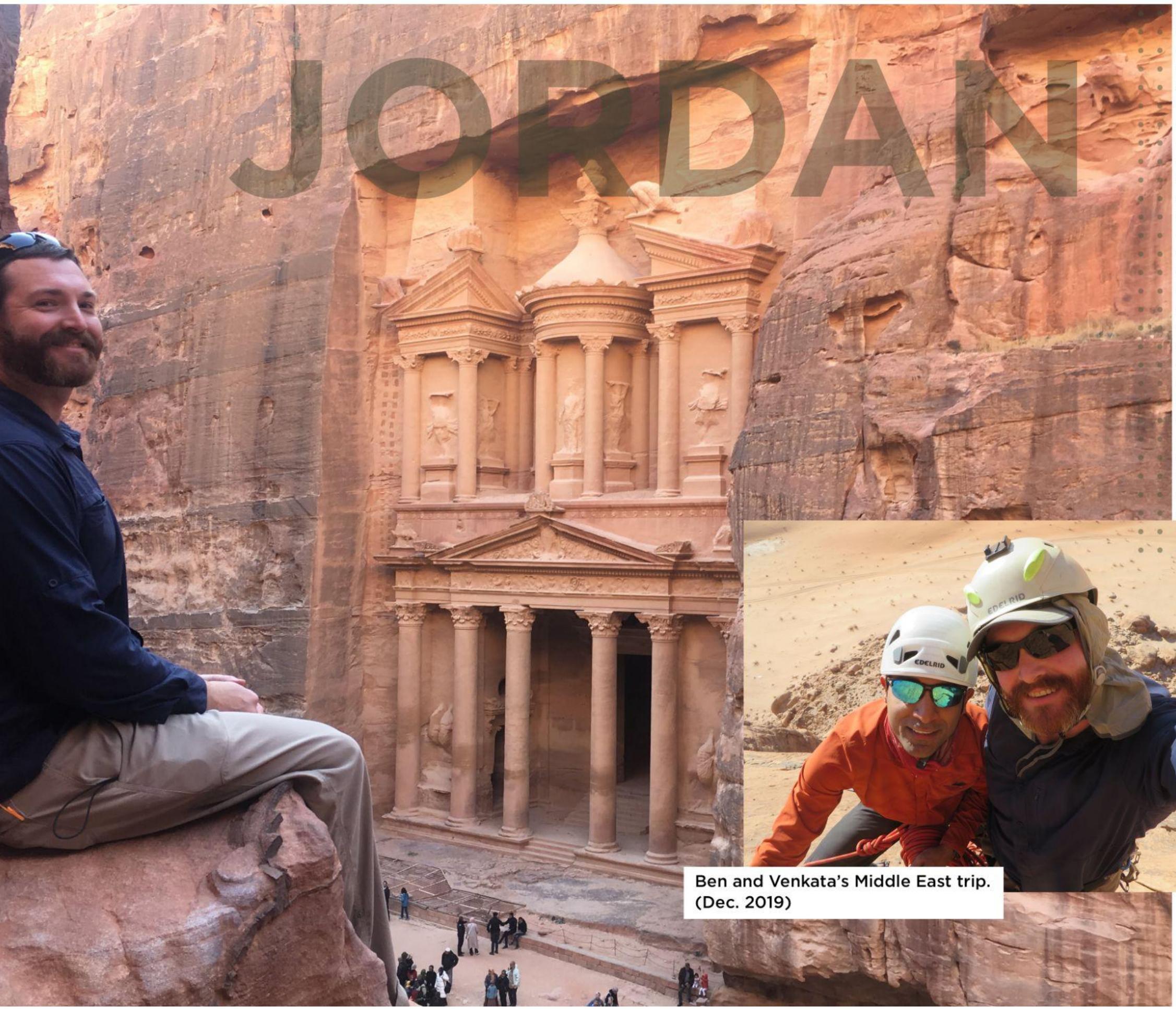
Stonehenge
Wiltshire

GREECE



(2016)







Photos taken by Ben.

PERU

(2017)



TORRES DEL PAINE CHILE

(2018)

BEN'S LOVE OF CLIMBING & THE OUTDOORS



His Mom got a jungle gym for Ben, and he was always on it. She had to re-arrange her furniture; so the jungle gym was in the living room, so she could see him from the kitchen - otherwise she'd never see him!
(Jan. 1988)

Ben had a passion for climbing from the time he could walk. He ascended everything in sight, anywhere, with an intensity of purpose and energy that were exceptional. When he went to a playground, he could have swung, slid and climbed all day and night. His mother often had to "bribe" him to leave with some sort of treat - maybe a favorite food (he did love food!), or maybe a favorite book.

His hunger for knowledge - for exploring and understanding the world around him - exceeded even his drive to climb. And he was very strong-willed - it was not easy to tell him what he should do - he always knew exactly what he wanted and needed to do.



Ben rock climbing with his cousin Jesica.
(May 1990)



MITOC cheese-melting trip at the RASTA glades, Vermont. Ben at top left and Florian in middle right, other leaders James Turrito and Daniel Deluca at bottom left.
(Jan. 23 2018)

The first time I met Ben was during the lecture he gave on snow shelters during Winter School 2018. I was new to the city (and the country), and like many who join MITOC, I was looking for outdoor adventures and friends to experience them with.

Ben was a leader on my third MITOC trip. He, James, and Caroline brought us skiing to the RASTA glades in Vermont. But the highlight of the trip was not the skiing: it was the fondue and the time we shared around the melting cheese, trying to stay warm. Ben was always kind, welcoming to new faces, and extremely funny. He was one of the leaders who made me want to get more involved in the club and made me feel like I could belong here.

Though I only climbed with Ben a handful of times, and was not as close to him as some in the club, I learned a lot from him. To tie the end of the rope when climbing outside. To gently lower the rope before rappelling at the Gunks rather than throwing it, because "eh, if you were leading, 15ft above a questionable piece, maybe you wouldn't want to take a rope to the face". To bring a tiny hammer when following trad. To say "no" to people, too. Ben gave me some of this advice when we just ran into each other at a crag, as we often did. Not because he was showing off his deep knowledge of climbing; Ben never felt patronizing. Just because he cared about our safety.

As Ana told me recently, "Ben may have loved teaching climbing more than climbing itself". I can believe that. Last summer, still needing crutches to walk, Ben was at Rumney leading a trip with Aileen and I. Unable to climb, he was still belaying, spotting gri-gri set backward from an impressive distance, managing the group with ease, and encouraging everyone to climb, and to be safe. Ben was the kind of leader I was, and am still, aspiring to become.

During MITOC board meetings (which are sometimes... long-winded), the presence of Ben - wearing sandals, sitting deeply in the only comfortable armchair of the office - was usually a guarantee for at least a few sparkles of laughter. But to experience Ben's exceptional and unique sense of humour at its full potential, you had to stay with him at a cabin. King of Intervale, Ben was usually at the center of the room, sitting on his throne: a foldable camping chair - that included a foot rest - he always carried all the way up to the cabin. He would always kindly but firmly remind forgetful incoming guests to "close the f**** door." His stories about climbing, traveling, food, or anything else always captivated the audience. His intonation, his intentional and very precise choice of words, made him a very talented story-teller. Crowds were pleased, and he surely enjoyed it too.

Ben, you are a dear friend and a pillar of our community. Thank you for all the work, time, and care you put into MITOC and you gave to everyone you crossed paths with. I am grateful for the times we spent together.

- Florian Pagnoux



Ben, David Migl, Lev, and I climbed Whitney Gilman on Sunday, July 24, 2016 at a MITOC rock climbing weekend retreat. Whitney Gilman is a classic multi sport climbing route up Cannon Mountain and I spent all day looking up at Ben (literally and figuratively). This day was the first time I had ever climbed a multi pitch route before and the thrill of spending the day on the side of a mountain stands out as one of my favorite memories with the MITOC community. I had seen Ben in passing at various club events before but had never interacted one on one before this trip. I remember being so impressed by Ben's ease of climbing, calm demeanor, and fluidity to his movements. Ben was also very prepared regarding gear and came down with a hula skirts' worth of climbing protection jangling from his harness.

- Cleo Stannard

This page and facing: the trip where David, Cleo, and Ben all first met.
(July 24, 2016)



Ben was a valued mentor and friend, competent yet humble and understated and willing to teach anyone who wanted to learn. I met him at the MITOC Climber's Circus in July 2016 where we climbed the Whitney Gilman route on Cannon Cliff.

For the next couple years, going to the mountains for me became synonymous with calling up Ben and heading north in his '95 Dodge Neon to spend the weekend in NH. Ben was an all-round outdoorsman, climbing disciplines of sport, trad, aid, ice, and backcountry and resort skiing, though he was most at home in the mountains, often in flip flops and his red, white, and blue headband. Hanging out in the MITOC cabins after the day's climbing, we discussed inspiration for planning bigger trips across the globe.

- David Migl



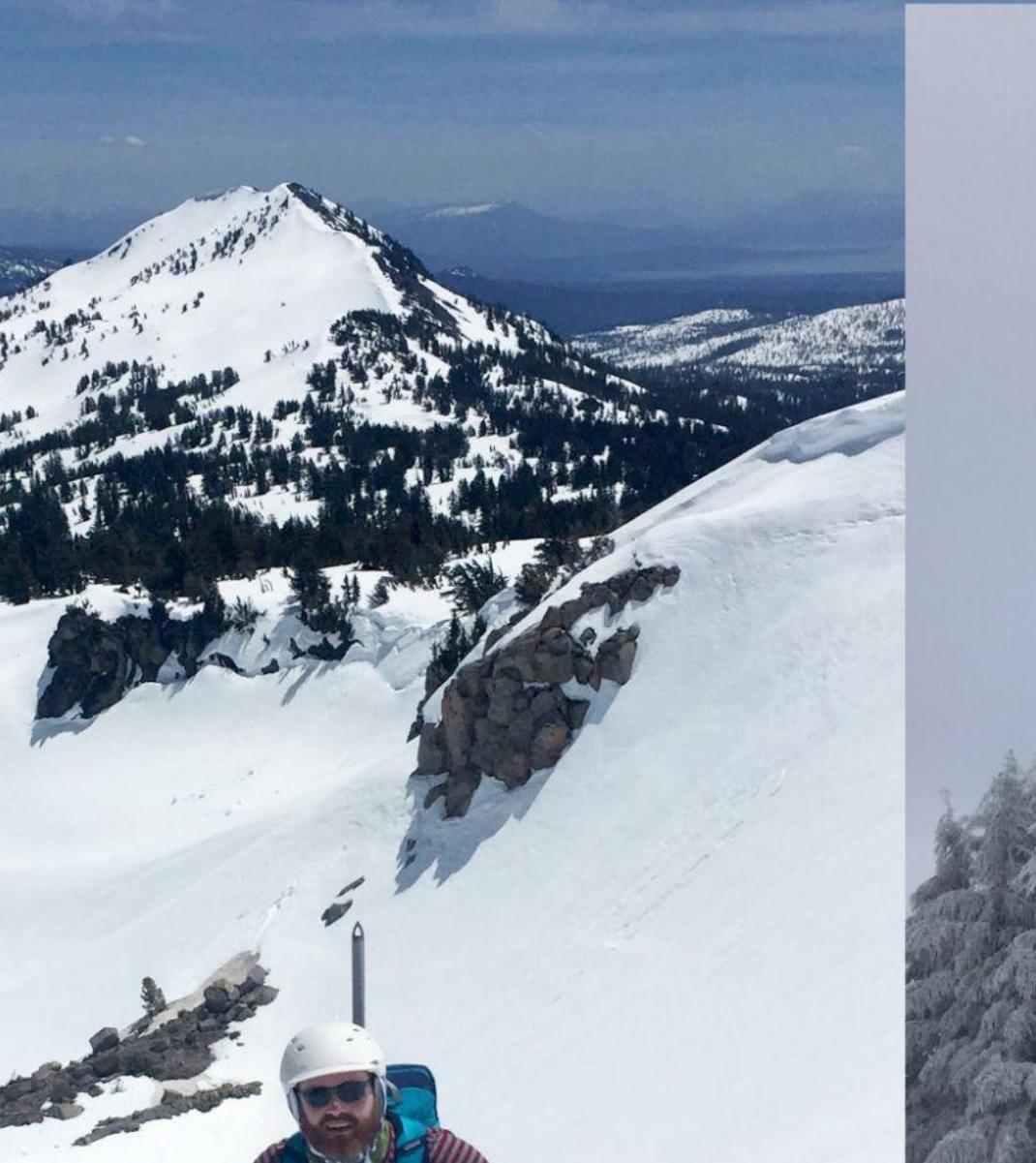
Helen Lake campsite.
(May 7, 2017)



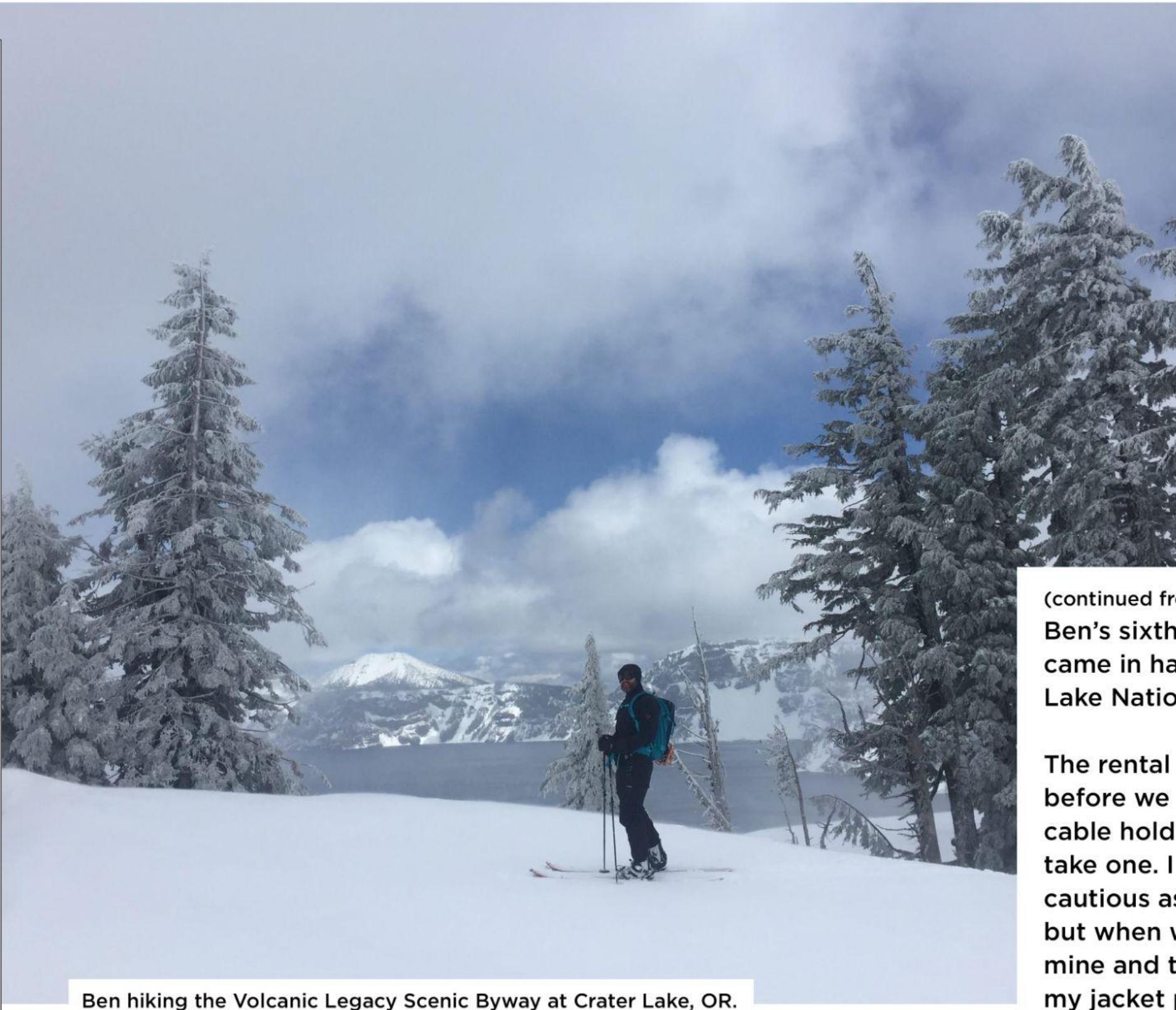
Mt. Shasta and Lassen Peak California.
David Migl, Ben, and Neil Titchener
(May 7-8, 2017)

Ben was an avid snowboarder and, like climbing, enjoying using this hobby to get into the mountains. In 2017 we trained for a backcountry ski trip on the local destinations Doublehead Mountain and Tuckerman Ravine, and headed to CA and OR for a ski trip over Memorial Day weekend 2017 with friends Neil Titchener and Tom Playford.

- David Migl



Ben ascending Lassen Peak.
(May 10, 2017)



Ben hiking the Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway at Crater Lake, OR.
Photo credit David Migl, story at right.
(May 12, 2017)

(continued from previous page)
Ben's sixth sense for traveling efficiently came in handy the last day at Crater Lake National Park in Oregon.

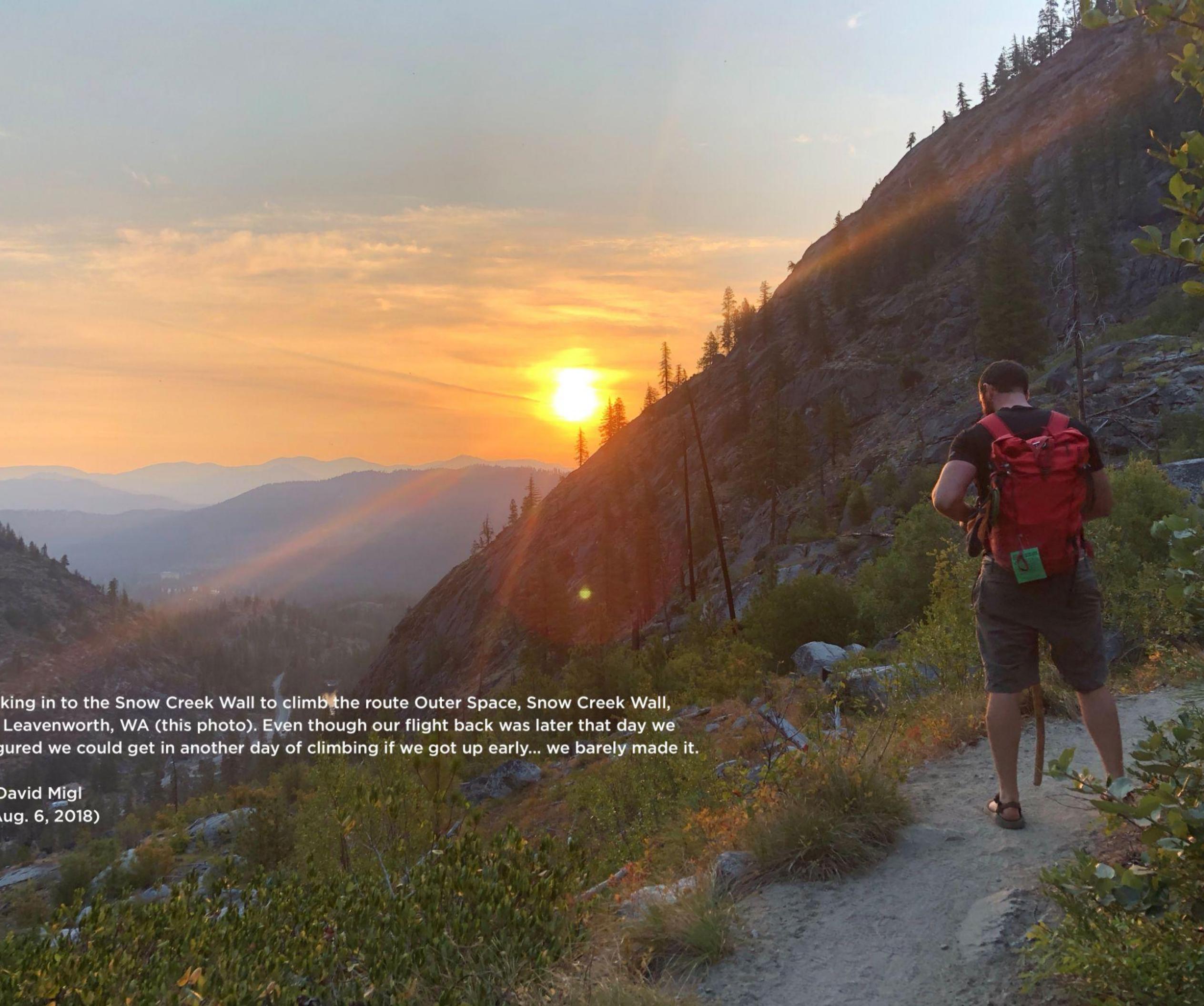
The rental car came with two keys but before we left Ben insisted we break the cable holding them together and each take one. I thought this was overly cautious as I'd never lost my keys before but when we came back I couldn't find mine and they must have fallen out of my jacket pocket. He handed me his spare key with not a word but only a look that said "I told you so."

- David Migl



Ben and I met up in the Cascades of Washington for a week in July 2018. After an attempt on Mt. Baker crossing crevasses and climbing snow and ice on the North Ridge (this photo, Aug. 4, 2018), Ben decided rock climbing was more of his style. For the rest of the trip, Ben was all smiles as we climbed sport in Mazama.

- David Migl



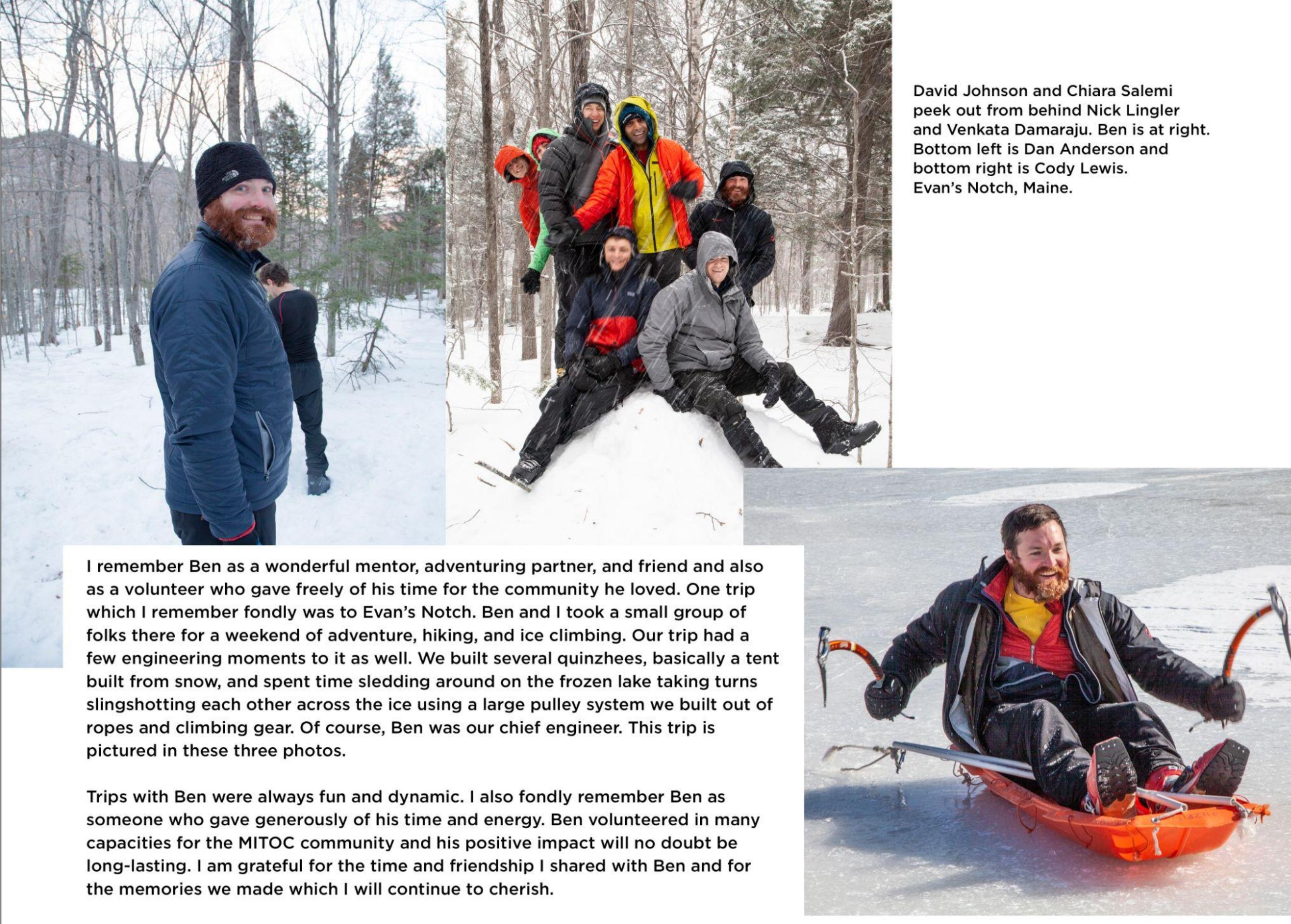
Hiking in to the Snow Creek Wall to climb the route Outer Space, Snow Creek Wall, in Leavenworth, WA (this photo). Even though our flight back was later that day we figured we could get in another day of climbing if we got up early... we barely made it.

- David Migl
(Aug. 6, 2018)

"The Mitten"

It's safe to say that I shared a truly unique bond with Ben. A few years ago at Camelot, I accidentally melted my left mitten in the campfire. Fast-forward a few months and I was back at Camelot, bemoaning the puzzle of what to do with an orphaned right mitten. In a remarkable coincidence, Ben (sitting next to me) had lost his right mitten while climbing earlier that day! Both of us were quite satisfied by this turn of events, and we flipped a coin to determine who would keep the mismatched set of mittens. Ben won the toss, and the mismatched mittens made many more appearances on MITOC trips.

- David Lawrence



David Johnson and Chiara Salemi peek out from behind Nick Lingler and Venkata Damaraju. Ben is at right. Bottom left is Dan Anderson and bottom right is Cody Lewis. Evan's Notch, Maine.

I remember Ben as a wonderful mentor, adventuring partner, and friend and also as a volunteer who gave freely of his time for the community he loved. One trip which I remember fondly was to Evan's Notch. Ben and I took a small group of folks there for a weekend of adventure, hiking, and ice climbing. Our trip had a few engineering moments to it as well. We built several quinzhees, basically a tent built from snow, and spent time sledding around on the frozen lake taking turns slingshotting each other across the ice using a large pulley system we built out of ropes and climbing gear. Of course, Ben was our chief engineer. This trip is pictured in these three photos.

Trips with Ben were always fun and dynamic. I also fondly remember Ben as someone who gave generously of his time and energy. Ben volunteered in many capacities for the MITOC community and his positive impact will no doubt be long-lasting. I am grateful for the time and friendship I shared with Ben and for the memories we made which I will continue to cherish.

- David Johnson



Ben, David Migl, and Ana Beglova at Laguna Churup (4450m - Huaraz, Peru) on an acclimatization hike.
(June 2 - 3, 2017)

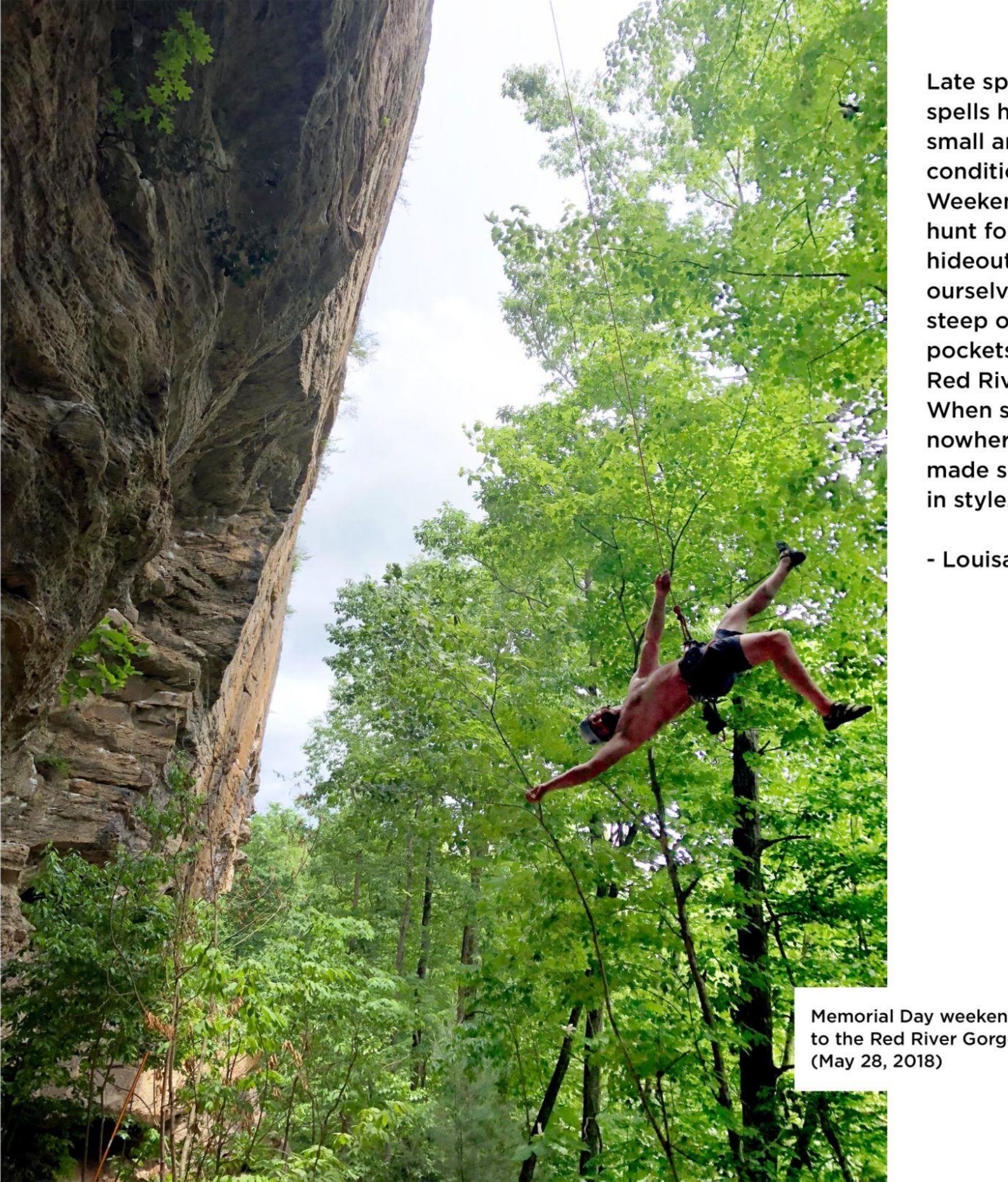


Ben convinced Ana Beglova and me to travel to the Cordillera Blanca range in Peru for a 10-day trip in June 2017 after scouring flight deals for a week and finding cheap flights to Lima. While we had high ambitions of quickly sumitting and descending back down before the altitude caught up with us, we ended up spending most of the time trying to catch our breath in the Refugio Pisco hut together playing cards and drinking tea. On our final attempt when it became clear we were moving too slowly to summit, Ben was the voice of reason that suggested we turn around and enjoy the view instead. We spent the rest of the trip doing sport climbing at Hatun Machay, visiting touristic sites, and exploring the city of Lima.

- David Migl



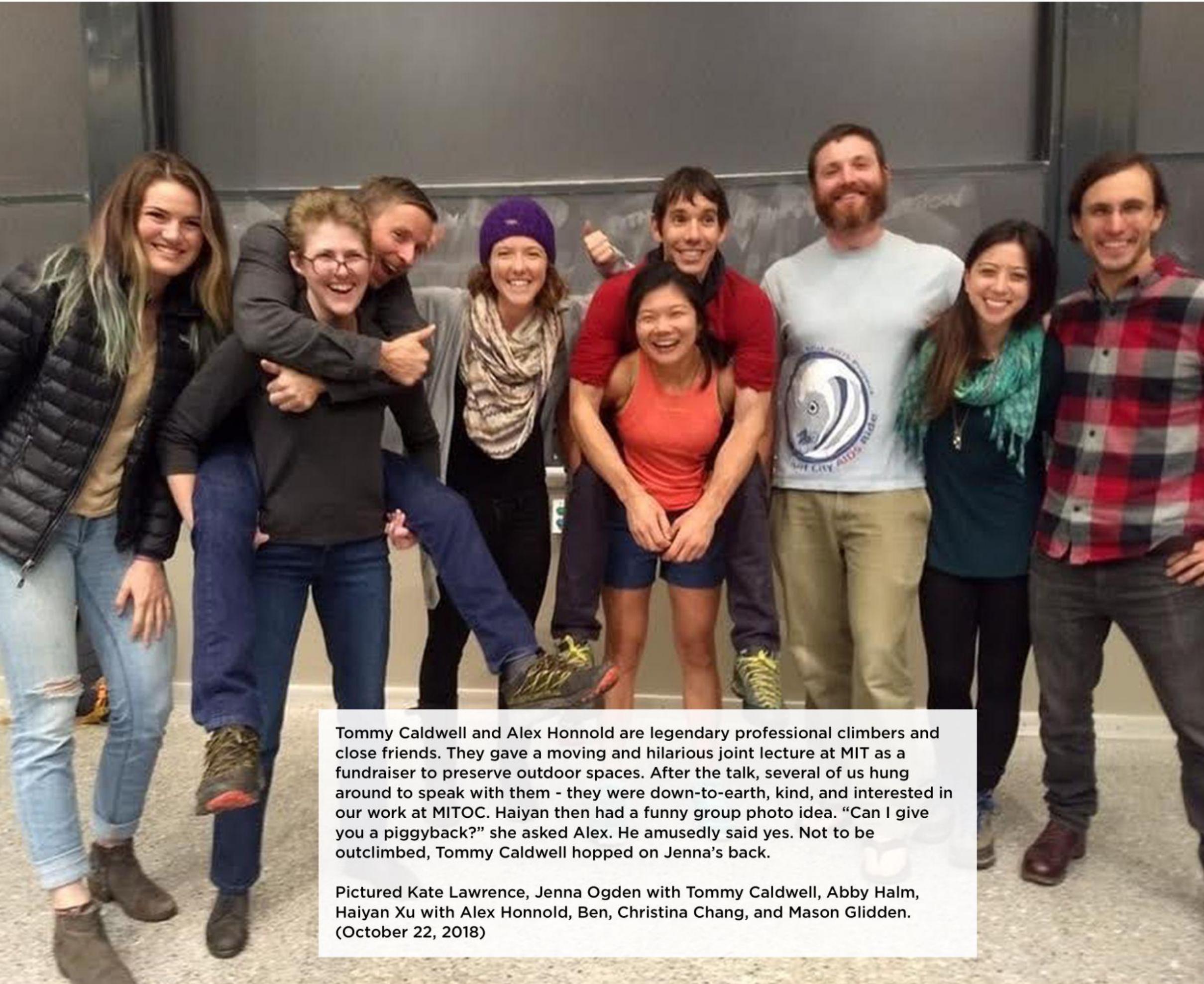
Ben on the approach to Nevado Pisco (5752m), with Huandoy (6395m) in the background.
(June 7, 2017)



Memorial Day weekend trip
to the Red River Gorge, KY.
(May 28, 2018)

Late spring in the southeast spells heat, humidity, and no small amount of rain. Wet conditions over Memorial Day Weekend in 2018 sent us on a hunt for dry rock and shady hideouts. So it was we found ourselves pulling hard on the steep overhangs and tiny pockets that make Kentucky's Red River Gorge famous. When sending temps were nowhere to be found, Ben made sure to lower off in style.

- Louisa French



Tommy Caldwell and Alex Honnold are legendary professional climbers and close friends. They gave a moving and hilarious joint lecture at MIT as a fundraiser to preserve outdoor spaces. After the talk, several of us hung around to speak with them - they were down-to-earth, kind, and interested in our work at MITOC. Haiyan then had a funny group photo idea. "Can I give you a piggyback?" she asked Alex. He amusedly said yes. Not to be outclimbed, Tommy Caldwell hopped on Jenna's back.

Pictured Kate Lawrence, Jenna Ogden with Tommy Caldwell, Abby Halm, Haiyan Xu with Alex Honnold, Ben, Christina Chang, and Mason Glidden. (October 22, 2018)



Ana Beglova, Haiyan Xu and Ben skiing on Wildcat Mountain in Gorham, NH.
(Nov. 23, 2019)

Ben and I met through MITOC, and traveled to Peru together a few years back. But the story I'd like to tell is this: in 2020, I had a week and a half between jobs. I saw Ben at a MITOC Meeting, and he asked, "Why aren't you in Paris right now?" And it turned out there were plane tickets for, not Paris, but Madrid, for 2 days from then, for \$350. And since Ben had been to Spain many times, he had amazing recommendations for what to do there. So I ended up buying the tickets and going on my first solo travel trip; it was amazing. It wouldn't have happened if it weren't for Ben. He was a really wonderful person, to travel with and do outdoors things with. So hilarious and enthusiastic, and very safe. Doing things with Ben was always wonderful. I am so grateful to have met him.

- Ana Beglova



Ben with friends Mason Glidden, Christina Chang, and Haiyan Xu on that rainy day. Photo credit Steph Plant.
(May 19, 2018)

The “hot springs” of New Hampshire

Twice in 2018, Ben shared with me the magical “hot springs” of New Hampshire (aka the hot tub at his mom’s condo in North Woodstock).

The first time was on January 13, 2018, after he, Neil Titchener, Rui Lopes and I led a MITOC trip to the Lonesome Lake. We had pretty awful weather — a windy and wet wintry mix that left us sad and soggy. Neil and I were winter school chairs that year and had been too consumed with other responsibilities that week to really think through our learning objectives for the intro level trip, but Ben saved the day by providing our participants with a great lesson on ice axe usage while we warmed up by the fire in the Lonesome Lake hut. After the trip, Ben and I were carpooling back to the Camelot cabin, and he suggested a quick detour — a chance to warm up in a hot tub and to delay our arrival to a cold cabin? It wasn’t a hard sell :)

In the spring, Ben invited a bunch of folks to stay at the condo — for climbing, hiking, or whatever activities they were stoked about and for camaraderie in the condo. May 19, 2018 was *another* bad weather day, so instead of doing much climbing, it was a great time to enjoy the hot tub once more (with some chilly dips into the nearby lake as well). Hot tub antics were followed by a big dinner, drinks, and games.

Ben’s generosity to be so inclusive and welcoming in sharing his knowledge, time, attention, and “hot springs” with me and so many others is something I admire about him greatly. He made the MITOC community warmer and kinder, and I will appreciate him always.

- Steph Plant

Dear Ben,

It was dark and cold around 6am on Sunday January 28th, 2018 on Highland Avenue in Somerville. We'd met briefly during the Pre-Trip Meeting: You were a seasoned Ice Climbing Leader, and I knew next to nothing about the outdoors. But I'd eagerly rented a backpack, winter boots, and crampons from the MIT Outing Club, and I was excited to learn as much as I could. I was anxious to fit in. The only one riding with you up to Kinsman, I clambered gratefully in that car that you lovingly insisted was running great, even though she had a hole in the floor and the windows didn't close properly. Could I fit in, could I impress you? I needn't have worried. Though strangers, we spent the two-hour drive laughing ourselves silly. Everything I said, all my childhood stories, you would create a hilarious conversation about with your dry, steady wit. I miss your easy, "yes and" sense of humor and the way you could set anyone at ease - even a stressed out newbie like me.

Our origin story as friends began my journey as an outdoor athlete, and every step of the way in our friendship, you were my mentor. At the beginning of Rock Season, you co-organized a MITOC Climbers Retreat to facilitate connections, but folks had to plan their own personal trips for legal reasons. As a newcomer, I didn't have friends to climb with that weekend, and I felt lost and overwhelmed at the prospect of planning a climbing trip myself. Though you had many responsibilities and goals the first night — from coordinating and cooking dinner to socializing with the 40+ climbers at the event — you checked in on me and made sure I wouldn't get left behind, by organizing a low-key trip yourself for all of us who were new. In your characteristic

welcoming style, you never suggested we'd dropped the ball on planning or didn't belong in the hardcore circle of the climbing community yet.

That season, you took several of us under your wing. You suggested and belayed me on the first 5.10 I climbed outside, believing in my strength and skill long before I would have on my own. You did so with your easy, no-pressure style: "Hey, there's the climb Rhino Bucket. I think you'll like it. I think you can do it." You cheered me on and celebrated me when I reached the top. As I progressed, you knew when it was time for our first multipitch sport climb, taking Mason and me up Rock Du Jours (5.9+, 55m) for my biggest adventure to date; it felt so impressive and magical. Thank you for mentoring us new climbers even though you could have spent your time doing more exciting climbs. When we were ready to lead our own multipitch trad route during the final weekend of the fall 2018 MITOC Rock Program, you provided just the right level of challenge to show me that I was more capable than I knew. You and Chris Courtin led up Endeavor (5.7, 167m) and Mason and I swung leads after you, close enough that you could help us if needed and far enough away to let us grow our independence as new trad leaders.

I treasure the way you naturally, quietly repelled the cutthroat, "macho," ascetic undercurrents in climbing culture by bringing your values of community, humanity, calm and comfort to our outdoor experiences. You preferred to start trips at a reasonable hour of 8am, even 9am if you could negotiate it. You believed in breakfast stops at Dunkin instead of rushing to beat everyone to the crag. You taught me to love the B-Side Diner for post-Gunks climbing dinners, where you taught

me to order burgers for dinner and a full plate of whipped cream-topped waffles for dessert. We brought camaraderie and spirit to the Rock Program participants by designing silly logos for its t-shirts and stickers together. I love your eternal optimism about the weather, the weather tracking spreadsheet you made to pick where to go each weekend, and the way you'd stay the full weekend, committed despite the changing forecast, hoping for sun (it did seem to appear most of the time!).

You were an incredibly influential leader in our community, especially because you were so humble and quiet about it. Thank you for being my North Star of how to do the right thing even when nobody was watching. You led from behind the scenes, making sure we were all happy and cared for, doing the unglamorous jobs, like managing upkeep of the cabins and leading beginner climbing trips. I value how you elevated the voices of others and helped me create inclusive experiences for women climbers. You respected everyone no matter where you were on the planet, irrespective of anyone's station in life or background - you just didn't see the world through that lens. You taught others to respect and appreciate the outdoors, and provided young climbers the right warm, welcoming and supportive conditions to grow.

Beyond your climbing mentorship, your friendship made my life so much richer. I cherish our thought-provoking conversations that seamlessly and humorously wove together engineering, engines, and sustainability together with climbing and climate change.

Thank you for supporting me professionally, including spending time together at Greentown Labs and attending my PhD thesis defense. Beyond our shared passions for climbing and energy technology, our friendship was as deep and wide as the adventures we took together, from the time we donned our sleuthing hats and tracked down your towed car at midnight, to our 4th of July adventure with Haiyan and Mason in 2018 (photo below). We lashed together Haiyan's two small \$20 inflatable kayaks as a "flotilla" and,

accompanied by what provisions we'd procured quickly — 2.5 oars, a brick as an anchor, an ocarina as a safety whistle, headlamps as safety lighting, a "nautical suitcase" of beer and fridge leftovers, and four life-vests you'd convinced the pier people to loan to our sorry selves for free — we (mostly you) rowed ourselves to the center of the Charles River to watch the fireworks. I loved



Mason and Christina (front boat) out on the Charles with Haiyan and Ben (middle boat). We made friends with Emi Lutz's boat (back). They gave us cake! (July 4, 2018)

created emotional space for both Mason and me to heal our shattered hearts. Though you never said a word about it, we later figured out that you held twice as many social gatherings that summer, so that nobody had to pick sides and everyone felt included. Thank you, Ben. That was one of the most meaningful acts of service that any friend has ever done for me.

Ben, thank you for changing my life and teaching me so much. I celebrate our precious, beautiful time together.

Love,

Christina Chang



(Sept. 15, 2018)

I first met Ben on the first weekend of the MITOC Rock Program in 2018. He taught me how to lead climb! All I can remember is how incredibly fun the entire day was, with him and Alex Garcia trading stories and jokes as we overcame our fears. It's something I'll never forget. Ben was truly a wonderful person, and greatly loved by all at MITOC. (Photo of Ben above, from that weekend.)

- Biswaroop Mukherjee



(Mar. 14, 2020)

Ben enjoyed many trips with MITOC friends to the Gunks in New Paltz, NY. Ben also loved nerding out about gear. On the last group trip I shared with him (Ben, Cole Crawford, Mason Glidden, David Migl, Suzy McKinney, Keeley Dickey), Ben used proceeds from old gear he sold on consignment at the local gear shop Rock and Snow to buy a new set of Totem cams and I've never seen him more excited (photo above).

- David Migl



Bottom: Christina Chang

Front Row: Corina MacIsaac, Asha Park-Carter, Ben Kessel, Cole Crawford

Standing First Row: Avi Cramer, Emilie Skoog, Evan Williams, Florian Pagnoux, Jenna Ogden, James Hermis, Mason Glidden

Standing Second Row: Chris Saulnier, William "Blox" Bloxham, Brett Geiger, Paul Lilin

Standing Back Row: Chris Courtin, David Migl, Alex Garcia, Aileen Devlin

(Nov. 3, 2018)



(El Chorro. - 2012)

The first time I met Ben was in New Hampshire — of course. We (Julian Kwan, Christina Chang, and Mason Glidden) had just climbed the Eaglet. Ben was also in the mountains that weekend, and that evening invited all of us to stay at his family-owned condo. That night, we had an impromptu slideshow on the wall of climbing trips past. I remember excitedly talking about El Chorro (a winter sport destination in Spain that we had both separately visited). Mostly, in talking to Ben, I found myself feeling excitement and relief about soon joining a vibrant New England outdoor community; I was soon to move from the UK, and feeling a bit sad about leaving my climbing community there. Ben was welcoming and he seemed to be an integral part of the New England climbing community. It was a small thing, but for me it was significant. My Boston-based partner, Julian, had already climbed with him in the Gunks and helped run MITOC rock programs with him; Julian knew him to have an incredible amount of knowledge, and had a significant, enduring capacity for supporting those new to the outdoors.

In the following months, particularly in the summer, we saw Ben all over Boston — but not through any planning! We met him with his hand pedal bike along the Charles, and had a nice chat. We then saw him at a sand sculpture festival at Revere Beach — again with the hand pedal, waiting at a food truck for some fried snacks. We talked about climbing and his plans outdoors after recovery. Even while coming back from an injury, he was a positive force.

- Rebekah Larsen

Ben and I met during the winter of 2018/2019, on a carpool, when he generously offered to drive me home from Medford, out of his way, after a weekend in the Gunks and late return. I was amazed that his car was still running, and skeptical of the flip flops. After future winter trips, I realized that I had no idea what range of conditions those sandals saw.

Last spring, when Covid hit, I was staying with my parents, quarantined in a small house and a long way from friends. Like many of us, I was incredibly lonely. But Ben took it upon himself to keep the MITOC community together during that time, one of many instances of his kindness and indicative of the value he put on friendships. Knowing that I could log on to a group zoom to hang out was an incredibly valuable connection to have during that time.

Ben was calm, compassionate, and generous. Whether cruxing on a climb or facing world-altering pandemics, he was dauntless in turmoil and always reached out to others.

- Annie Hines



Photo credit Venkata
(The Gunks. May 18, 2019)

BEN LOVED HAMMOCKING

I only met Ben once, but he left such a kind impression.

He belayed me my first time ever climbing outside during a MITOC circus. I was terrified and actually screamed the first time I slipped, but Ben was supportive and kept cracking jokes to help put me more at ease. He just gave off such friendly and warm vibes, and it was clear that he spent his weekend belaying total newbie strangers up the cliff because he loved climbing and the MITOC community and wanted to share those experiences with anyone who wanted them.

He left a mark on so many people, even those of us who only met him once.

- Noreen Wauford



Chris Courtin, Avi Cramer, Ben and Neil Titchener.
(2018)

It seems like every ski tour Ben and I did together turned into an exceptionally memorable misadventure. I'll be thinking about him when I'm out on the snow this season.

- Avi Cramer



Photo credit Eleni Kanatsouli



A tribute to Ben. A friend, mentor and teacher to many.
(Painted October 2020 by Juliette Devillard)

Ben taught me to trad climb at the MITOC Rock Program of 2019. I will continue to remember his kindness and how he cracked jokes come sun and rain. He was always looking out for those around him, and I'm incredibly grateful for how welcoming he made the MITOC community feel when I first joined. Thank you for touching so many of our lives Ben.

- Juliette Devillard



Ben will always be the patient mentor and the friend with his unique sense of humor. Some favorite Ben memories: venturing out to look for a "Very Nice Crack" to learn to place gear, joking around while huddled under a ledge on the Eaglet after it unexpectedly began pouring, and his good natured teasing and words of wisdom as he hung out in a hammock on Rumney trips.

- Aileen Devlin

Hurricane Ridge, Olympic National Park.
Photo credit Ana Beglova.
(July 4, 2020)



Ben and Eleni met an international group (the Netherlands, Florida, and Spain) at the first hut. Ben quickly became the group's leader because of his hiking knowledge and skills. They ended up hiking the entire W trek together. Photos from this trip on both pages of this spread.
(Argentina, Nov. - Dec. 2018)

Glimpse of the Gentle Giant

I didn't have the privilege of knowing Ben Kessel very well. But like many dozens, if not hundreds of his other MITOC friends, a short time was all that was needed for him to have a big impact on me as both a climber, and as a person.

We first met at a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) course in the spring of 2019. He didn't make a very strong impression at first, but looking back there's a few things that stand out in my memory: He would sit off to the side, making sure his larger stature wasn't blocking the view to the instructor, but was always ready to be an active participant in the class. He was also clearly someone who had many stories to share, but when conversations would veer off-topic, he'd gently guide discussion back towards relevancy instead of taking his turn in the spotlight.

As the class went on it was obvious that he was very intently committed to learning as much about wilderness medicine and safety as possible. Another thing that became clear is that he had a rare gift: Ben had such a genuine attitude that he could communicate urgency in the importance of concepts and practices in safety without being uptight or patronizing.

Later that summer, I got to know Ben in a different setting during the MITOC Rock Program. The same communication skills that set him apart in the WFR class were incredible to experience as his pupil. Underneath his unassuming but jovial demeanor, he also had endless patience. And while he had strong opinions, he would never be condescending or judgmental. Over the course of several weekends climbing trad together, it also became clear to me why Ben had taken the WFR course so seriously: there really was nothing more important to him than sharing his love of the outdoors with others, and making sure they were safe and happy.

This was really driven home for me on a trip to Cathedral Ledge State Park. On Saturday in June, Ben took Juliette and I on a series of multi-pitch trad climbs that he had done many times before – he was only really climbing them so we could gain trad experience. We climbed Thin Air, Fun Haus, Lower Refuse, and then accidentally, Retaliation (which is a whole other story). Despite the exhaustion and chore of leading all the pitches while belaying two seconds, Ben genuinely seemed to enjoy every minute of sharing the adventure that is multi-pitch trad climbing with his less experienced followers.

The next day we ended up at North End for single-pitch climbing. I insisted that Ben pick a route that he wanted to do as our first climb, and he gave me a toothy grin as he walked over to They Died Laughing, a beautiful 5.9 finger crack. While scanning the climb with his seasoned eyes he explained that he was a bit beat up from the day before and didn't feel great about leading it, but that he had aid gear in the car and that he would aid climb it, which would also leave me plenty of placements to examine and learn from.

It was smooth sailing up most of the route until a cam popped while Ben was making his next placement, resulting in a fall onto a small ledge, injuring his foot. We lowered him and tended to him as best we could, cleaning up his ankle and wrapping him in jackets and a trash bag for warmth. Despite being in a lot of pain, Ben prioritized the morale of the group, cracking jokes to keep us all laughing while his ankle swelled up to the size of a grapefruit. When Etha finally managed to get someone on the phone and said, "Well he's okay but there's a lot of blood..." Ben exclaimed, "No! You don't tell them that! You don't say there's a lot of blood!". He didn't want others to worry about him, even when he was in pain.

Eventually we got rescued by other MITOC folks who had been on a different trip, but Ben's ankle was broken, and his upcoming trip to the Dolomites had to be cancelled. It would eventually heal, but it would have been very easy for him to blame or lash out at the less experienced people he was climbing with. Me most of all since I had been belaying him when he fell. But in numerous encounters over that fall and winter he was just as friendly in his cast and crutches as he was in his helmet and harness.

Rock climbing has exploded in popularity over the last decade, leading to friction within the community as we struggle to deal with crowded routes, the destruction of trails and trees, litter, and the influx of inexperienced climbers venturing into new, sometimes dangerous territory. While it may be tempting and easy for those of us who have been around longer to adopt an attitude of "Stay out of my way unless you're on my level," my brief time knowing Ben Kessel has taught me that there's a better way: Kindness. Reaching out to new people, making them feel comfortable and welcomed in the community, and sharing genuine care and love.

We're all stuck on this planet together after all. That's something Ben seemed to understand on a deep level. And perhaps a good way to carry his legacy would be to move forward in life the way he did: by helping build communities where more people can be safe and happy together.

- Isaac Han



Isaac Han and Juliette Devillard with Ben.
(June 15, 2019)

Isaac, Juliette and Ben.
(June 15, 2019)



June 16th during MRP 2019 at the North End in Cathedral Ledges. I took this photo below shortly after Ben had taken his aid-climbing ledge fall during which I was belaying him. Despite being in great pain he kept everyone around him laughing. Etha was on the phone trying to figure out transportation and she had told someone "Well, he's okay but there's a lot of blood." To which Ben started cracking up and said, "No! You don't tell them that! You don't say there's a lot of blood!".

- Isaac Han





Finally back in Boston after breaking a foot at Cathedral. Evan Williams, Juliette Devillard, Ben, David Chang, Alex Garcia, and Isaac Han with Etha Williams (front). Pictured with the new Honda Fit on one of its first few trips. We shuttled Alex from Rumney to Cathedral because he could drive stick and get the Fit back to Boston. Full story on [prior page](#).
(June 16, 2019)

Ben was a great teacher, both in climbing and in life. Over his years in MITOC, he mentored scores of climbers and they, following his example, patiently taught others as well. At a climbing self-rescue session a couple years ago, I remember him patiently watching me from his hammock, sipping a drink, as I repeatedly practiced how to escape a belay. While I only climbed on the same rope with Ben twice, it's no understatement to say that all my climbing partners, in ways large and small, were taught by Ben. It's reassuring to know that every time I do tie in, preparing for an ascent up a sheer rock face, that there's a bit of Ben there with us too.

At the MITOC cabins, you could always find him settled near the fire, happy to offer you a seat and a drink. While I never knew exactly what we were going to talk about, I could be confident of quick wit and enjoyable company - our conversation topics spanned from the efficiency of various engines to the majesty of fast food (he's the reason I know about Burger King's frighteningly cheap chicken nuggets, now a core pillar of my wilderness diet).

You could always count on him for a smile, even when faced with inconvenient weather or imperfect circumstances. Once, after a full day of climbing, we got a call that he and a MITOC group needed help getting back home. As I drove across New Hampshire towards them, the whole car was quiet with worry. Yet there he was, with an injured leg propped up in his beloved Honda Fit and a grapefruit for an ankle, readily greeting us a wide grin and corny jokes.

His indefatigable cheer reminded us all how lucky we were to be nestled among the tall pines, but also how lucky we were to be in community with each other.

- David Chang



There is an absolutely perfect lounging rock at Rattlesnake Mountain in Rumney, NH. It's right by East Main Cliff near 'Model Citizen'. I found this spot the same day I met Ben. He led my first outdoor climbing trip in July, 2018. Few people on the trip had any outdoor climbing experience. But it didn't matter with Ben. He easily managed both ropes and climbers.

This is the only time I spent with Ben. But two years later, the memories are still fresh. Whenever I pass that perfect lounging rock at Rumney I remember Ben, as a mentor and as a friend. The vast number of lives he brightened, even if just for a day, immortalize him.

- Ana Lo



I didn't know Ben all that well, but he was one of the people that made me feel at ease within the MITOC community. Having lived in a city all my life, I joined MITOC as a young international undergraduate, unfamiliar with so many things in this part of the world, and unsure of myself as an outdoorsperson. I was quite nervous to be giving my Sean Collier presentation in December 2018 about how I had gone on my first solo hike in the Seattle area. Yet as I walked in the room to the event that Ben had organised, his relaxed demeanour and welcoming grin, and continuous encouraging smile throughout my talk, made me feel as if I belonged. He never made me feel small, be it on my first outdoor climbing trip with MITOC, leading us all with his foot in a brace, or while nervously sitting on the edge of a campfire trying to join in the group conversation. I remember helping him cook at a MITOC circus, impressed as he pulled out his home-made curry sauce in a large Ziploc bag, ready and prepped to feed over 40 people with delicious food. His was the cheeky grin that would greet me as I walked into a BOD meeting nervously, instantly calming my social anxiety. In my mind, I see him leaning back around the Camelot campfire, beer bottle in hand. A man who made an impact on even the peripheral characters in his life.

- Tafzia Shikdar

One evening at the Camelot cabin during the MITOC Rock program. From L to R: Anonymous, Aileen Devlin, Julian Kwan, Andee Wallace, Ben, and Odin Achorn.
(May 31, 2019)

Ben had a kind, gentle, and generous spirit that feels hard to put into words. He loved gathering with the MITOC community, and he wanted everyone he was with to feel the same joy and warmth that he did there. My favorite memories of Ben are just spending time talking, eating, and drinking with him at the MITOC cabins, at on-campus gatherings, and even on Zoom.

I participated in the 2019 MITOC Rock Program, and I remember how proud Ben was of the group he'd put together and how patiently he worked with each of us to help make us safer, more confident climbers. He loved sharing what he'd learned in his many years climbing, and he had a rare gift for giving feedback in a way that was always direct and honest, yet also kind and non-judgmental.

On the third weekend of the rock program (June 15-16, 2019), the trad track had planned to stay at Intervale; but a rainy weather forecast for Sunday sent everyone home but me, Ben, and two other participants. I don't think Ben was particularly more optimistic about the weather than anyone else; more than anything, he was eager to spend the weekend in a community he loved. The four of us cooked dinner for 20—and Ben did his best to get us to eat all of it, too. I don't remember exactly what we chatted about that night, but I remember feeling a warmth and joy that made me glad I'd decided to stay, even if we didn't get to climb the next day.

The weather ended up working out in our favor, so the four of us went to climb some single pitch at Cathedral's North End. Unfortunately, the day didn't go the way we hoped—Ben broke his ankle in a fall, and our focus moved to taking care of his injury and finding a way home. Amidst all this, Ben remained calm and tried to keep our spirits up, laughing about the situation without minimizing it. I remember in particular a lot of laughter around the genuinely ridiculous driving situation, as it turned out that none of the rest of us had a U.S. driver's license.

That weekend was probably the most time I got to spend with Ben, but I also remember and cherish many small moments at MITOC gatherings that Ben brought warmth and a welcoming spirit to. If you were sitting on the sidelines of a conversation or group gathering, Ben would quietly turn to you and make you feel included. It never felt awkward or weird; you knew Ben was genuinely interested in you and wanted you to be part of the community he loved so much.

I particularly strongly remember an evening at the Muddy Charles Pub—I think it was during Winter School 2020, but I'm not entirely sure. I was quietly sipping a beer, not sure how to jump into a conversation with people who had been involved in the club longer than I had, and debating internally whether to stick around or call it a night. Ben noticed and struck up a conversation about what it meant to be a MITOC leader—the responsibility, and also the joy, involved in taking on this role. As I eased into the conversation, I remember thinking, "I'm glad I decided to stay."

On a MITOC Zoom call near the beginning of the pandemic, Ben and a few others of us were among the last to log off the call. Ben acknowledging the full magnitude of the difficulty and uncertainty we were all feeling—but doing so with a lightness and a sense of humor that made it feel better.

Ben meant so much to all of us.

- Etha Williams



No words can ever fully describe Ben Kessel. And somehow that feels right. I met Ben through the MIT Outing Club - a group based out of MIT that is open to all who want to adventure outside. I hope to share with you the Ben that we knew. In MITOC, he was a teacher, a creator of intentional community, and always, always, ready to talk to you about gear. He came alive outside with a laugh that we all can still hear. Ben showed up, gave back, and changed our community for the better.

At his core, Ben was a teacher. He had a love of learning that spanned from the outdoors, to internal combustion engines, to the best way to hang a hammock. Ben knew a lot. And, luckily for us, was always willing to share that knowledge. And, sometimes, some snark too. He was quiet in his competence, explaining without pretence. He looked out for and helped others, even when they didn't know they needed it. There are many people in MITOC, myself included, who didn't even realize how just much we had learned from Ben until we looked back and realized all that he taught us. Ben spent a lot of time teaching us those outdoor skills. But ultimately, he was really teaching us how to be mentors and leaders in our community.

While Ben may have found us because of his love for the outdoors, I think he stayed because of the people. When I think of Ben Kessel, one of the first things that I think about is this beat up, dirty, red, 70s-style office chair that lived in the Camelot Cabin. It was strategically placed - close both to the stove and to the people. And Ben, he turned that chair into a throne. He would park himself there after a day of tromping around in the snow and anyone who sat down nearby would find themselves drawn into a conversation. Stories would be traded, jokes would go from bad to worse, and beers just would disappear. In that drafty old New Hampshire cabin, Ben was a true source of warmth.

Ben brought us together in Boston as well. In early 2019, he ran for MITOC social chair. When asked what he wanted to do as social chair, Ben simply stated "Slideshows." and rested his case. Why slideshows? Well, Ben loved to travel. And he used those slideshows to

inspire and remind us of what else was out there. Of course, it didn't hurt that he now had a food budget. Although he did always make sure that the food didn't have fungi... even though Ben was indeed a fun-guy. Ben - thank you for bringing back the slideshows. You made space for us to imagine "Where do I want to be?" and to find others to explore our big wide world with.

MITOC is a kind of chosen family. And Ben Kessel, he was at the heart of that family. Through the time he spent outside with us, Ben came to span the whole social fabric of MITOC. So many people in our community have valued his time, his intention, and his care. Everybody loved being around Ben. We should all strive to be more like Ben. As one friend recently put it, Ben was an exemplary human being.

- Asha Park-Carter and Mason Glidden



Mason, Asha, Emma, Ben and Cole.
(June 6, 2020)

Mason Glidden with Ben and Annie Hines. Photo credit Dan Anderson.
(July 04, 2019)



Ben,

So many of my memories of you are centered around climbing. From humid summer days in the Gunks to cold winters in the Whites, you taught me how to climb. It formed the bedrock of our friendship, but it's not half of what it meant or what you taught me. You taught me how to teach, to help others without them even realizing. How to build community, in and out of the mountains. And, of course, how to find some killer deals on gear. I think of you constantly - at the cliff, around the campfire, and whenever there's free food. Thank you for everything. I miss you.

Love,
Mason



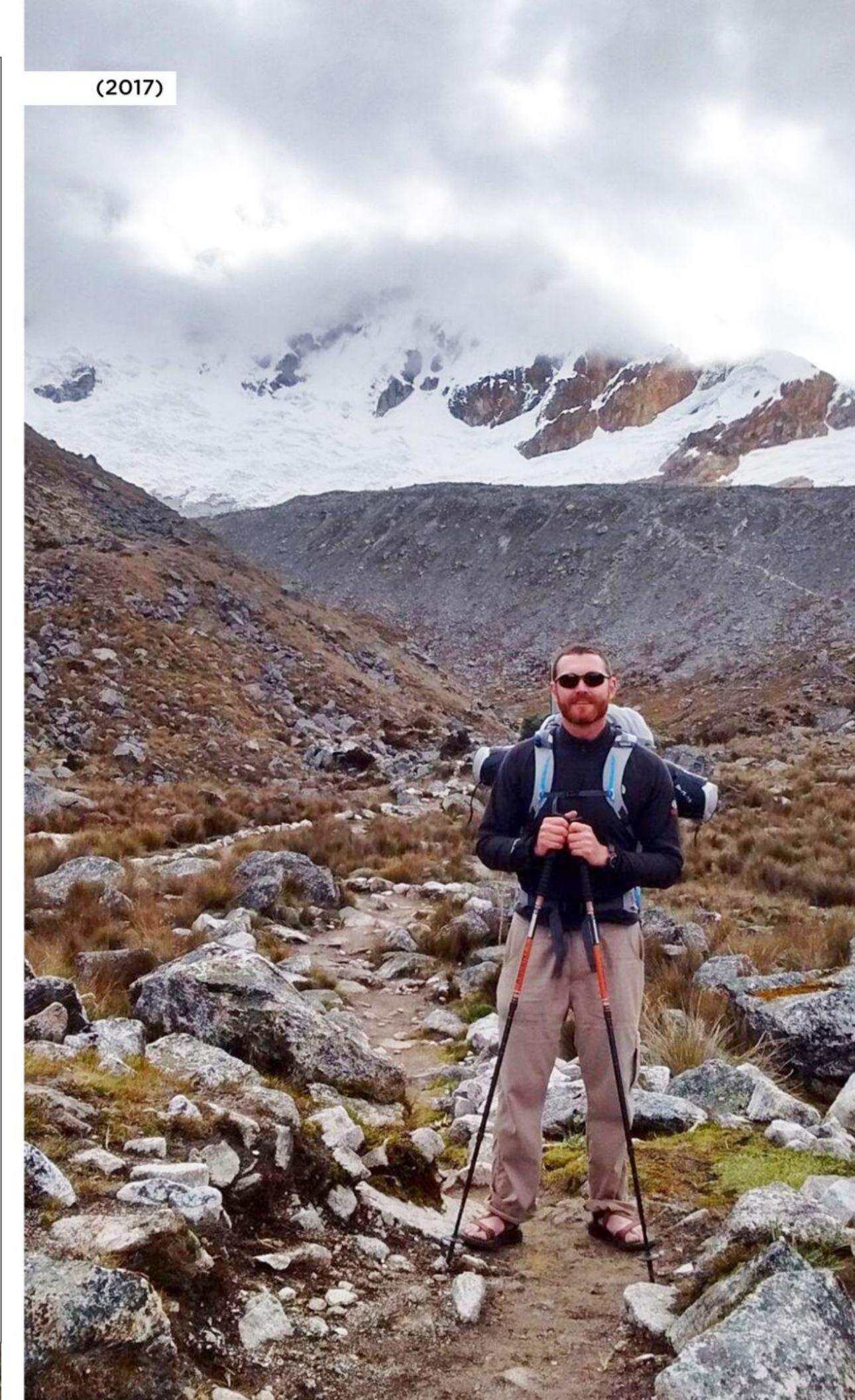
Ben,

At first, I remembered all the words we shared - the bad jokes, the MITOC logistics, the gear talk, the banter. But when I dig deeper, what I really feel in my memories are the silences. You were so good at accepting, at giving things space to be as they are. You were so patient with me. Remember that day at Rumney? I didn't have to explain, you just knew. And were silently supportive, always there to catch me or help if you could. I know you intellectually knew we cared about you, were so grateful for you. I told you sometimes and let you sputter in awkwardness. But I hope you felt it. Our lives won't be the same. There is a Ben-sized void that we will grow around, but never fill. I love and miss you, Mountain Man Ben.



- Asha

Four photos of Ben, courtesy of Asha Park-Carter.
(May 27, 2020)



(2017)

I knew Ben from the MIT outing club social events that he organized, the hiking and climbing trips we shared, and some volunteer training sessions we did together over a two year period.

When I reflect on the times I shared with Ben, the memory that stands out the most is when I very first met him. We were at MITOC's Intervale cabin in Jan 2018. It was my first trip with the club and we were spending the night at the cabin before leaving on a hike very early in the morning.

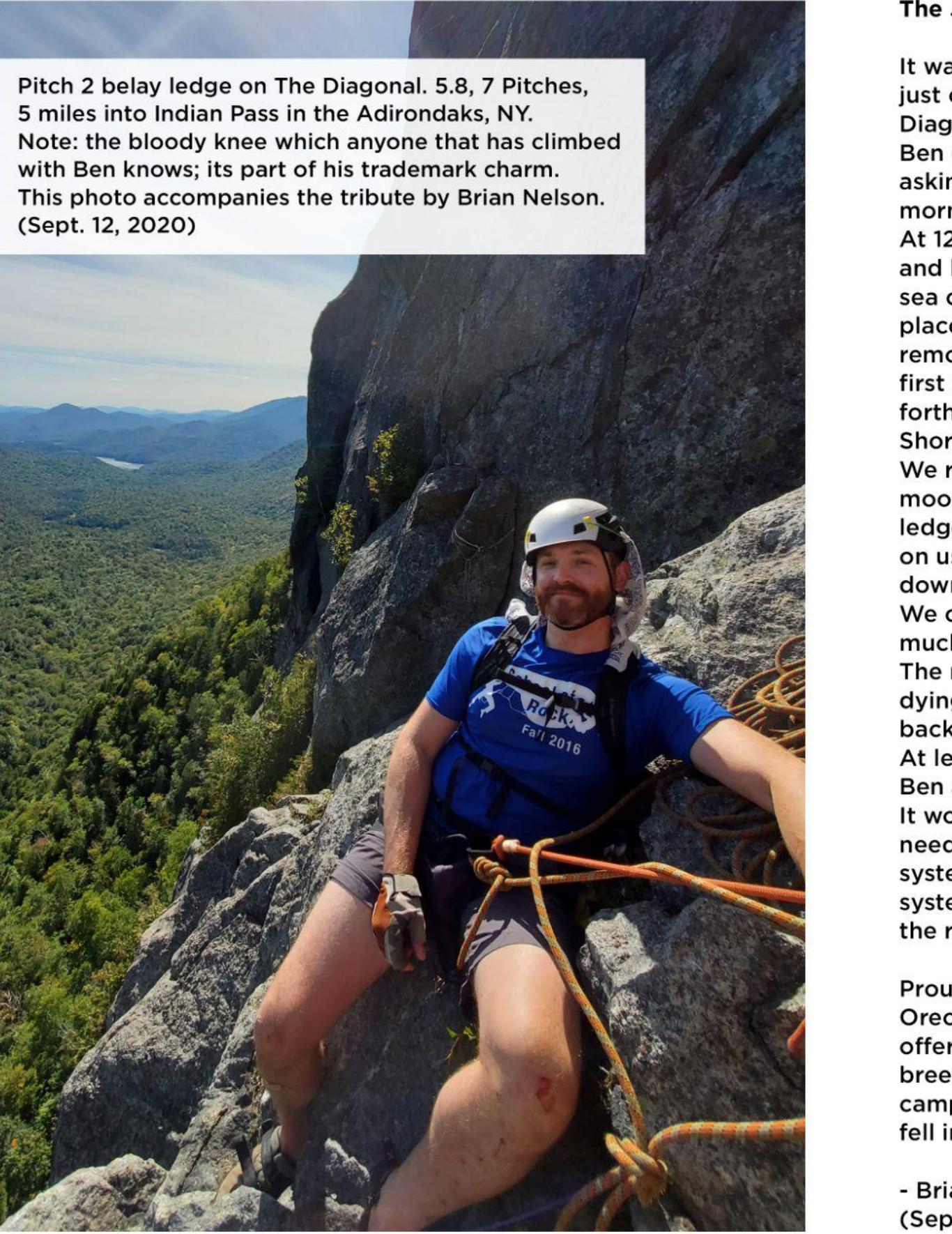
That night I found myself sitting in a dim corner of the small cabin, feeling lonely amongst the bustling crowd. I didn't know a single person there, I didn't belong to MIT and everyone else seemed to know each other very well. I felt a little bit trapped. I couldn't easily leave the cabin for some alone time given that it was about 4 degrees fahrenheit outside, but I also lacked the courage to insert myself into the festivities.

At that moment Ben spotted me and shuffled over. He gave me some of his food, a cold beer and a warm smile. He kept circling back to me throughout the evening, until I eventually found myself standing at the center of the gathering. He wasn't the slightest bit perfunctory. He was genuinely getting to know me, and he made me feel comfortable and welcome.

In the intervening time since that first adventure I've become enmeshed in the outing club and I've progressed to the level of trip leader. I mostly lead beginner level trips, so many of the people I take out have never been on an adventure with our club before.

Each time I make preparations for one of the trips I lead, I reflect back to that first evening with Ben. I will always strive to be as warm, welcoming and equanimous towards my participants as Ben was towards me.

- Josh Bradshaw



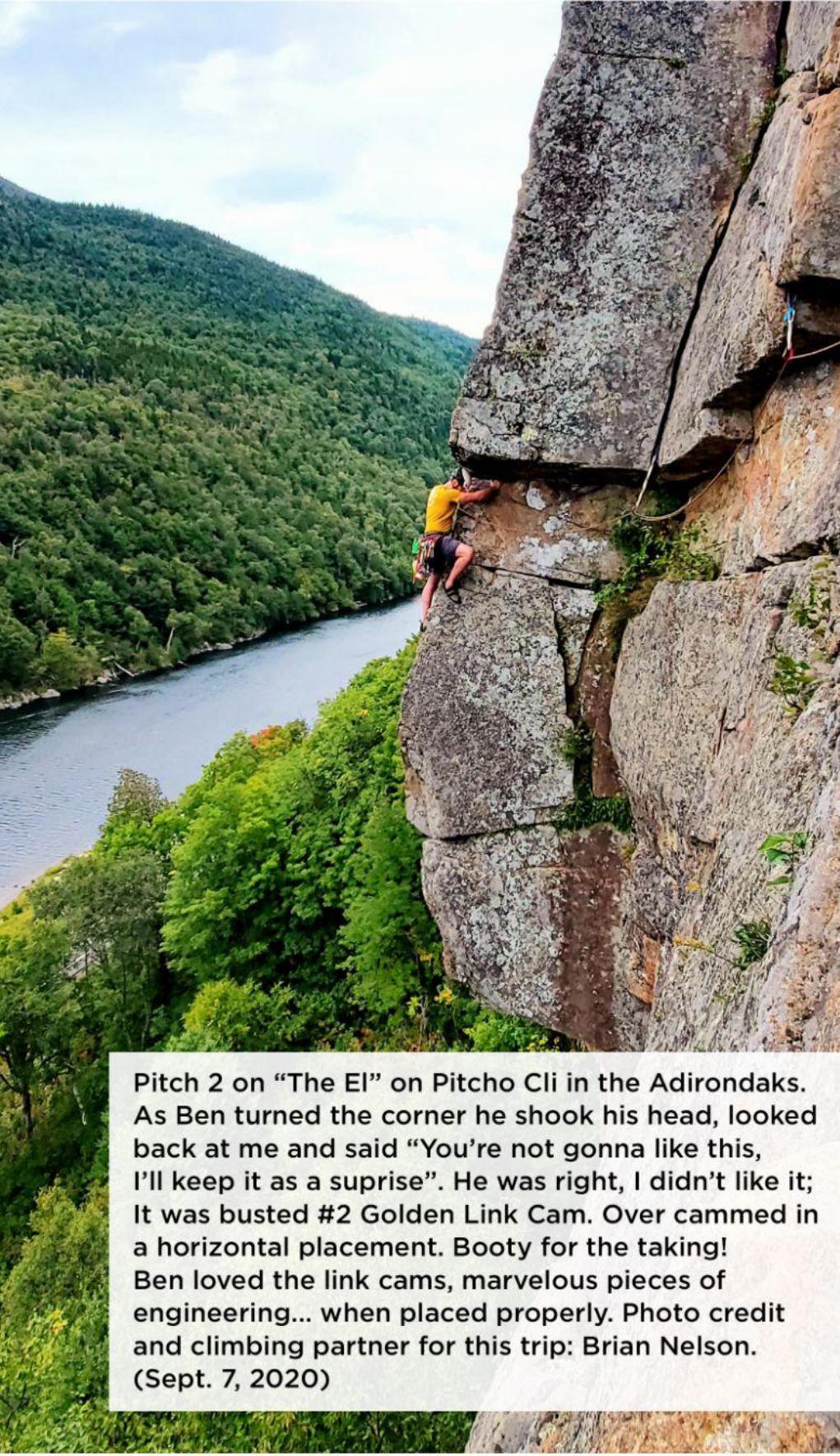
Pitch 2 belay ledge on The Diagonal. 5.8, 7 Pitches, 5 miles into Indian Pass in the Adirondaks, NY.
Note: the bloody knee which anyone that has climbed with Ben knows; its part of his trademark charm.
This photo accompanies the tribute by Brian Nelson.
(Sept. 12, 2020)

The Journey Up The Diagonal

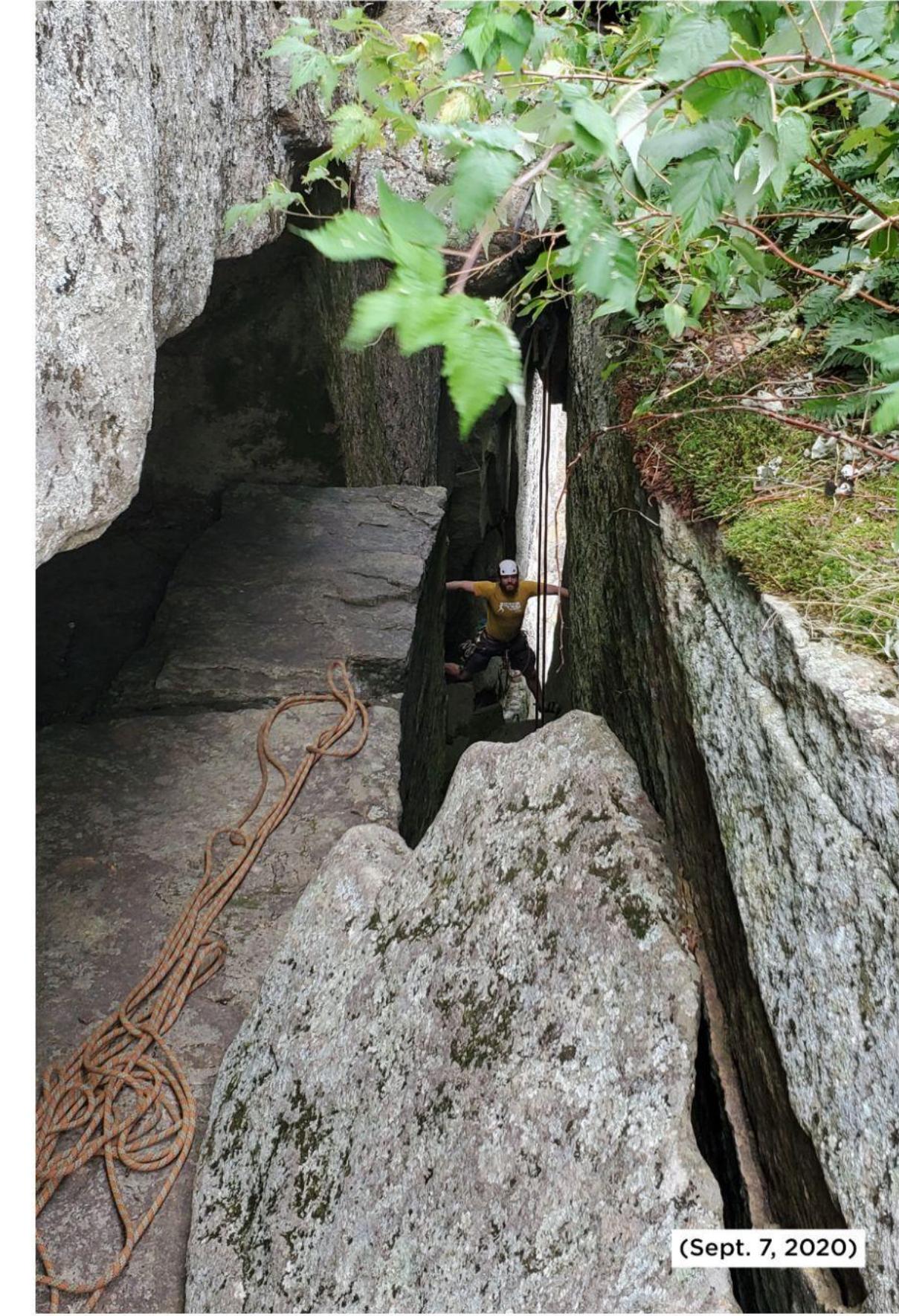
It was Friday night. Ana, Venkata and I were contemplating just cragging it the next day instead of climbing the Diagonal. It'd be easier and we could sleep in. But when Ben disappointingly heard the news, he convinced us, asking, "What are you gonna remember more?" So the next morning at 5 am we started our journey to the trailhead. At 12:00 after a 5 mile hike into Indian Pass, we set up camp and headed for the base. At 12:30, we had arrived at the sea of vertical granite that was the base of Wall Face, the place where we would start our ascent. I didn't know such remote beauty existed in the Humble Northeast. I took the first pitch and Ben took the second, we switched back and forth until the Bivy ledge before the final two 5.8 Pitches. Short enjoyable, well protected 5.8s to end the day. We reached the final anchors as the sun was setting to a moonless night. After the first rappel back to the bivy ledge, the darkness that the Adirondaks provides was fully on us. The next rappel was into the Void, about 40 feet down a slab to an overhang and about a 100 ft drop. We convinced Ben, he should go first, which didn't take much; he was happy to lead and went off into the darkness. The next and final station rested on some manky tat on a dying tree backed up by some heavy bushes a few feet back. But this was not our issue as the ropes would not pull. At least not with little effort. After yanking on it for a bit, Ben attached a grgri and used his whole weight to pull it. It worked, but capturing progress was an issue. He said we needed a second body with a prusic. The two person system acted as a constantly weighted progress capture system. After 20 minutes of the full body exercise, the rope pulled.

Proud of his accomplishment, Ben pulled out a 2 pack of Oreos he had taken from the AirBnB, ate one, and kindly offered me the other, I accepted. The last rappel was a breeze and our feet were safely down. We made it back to camp around 1 AM, where we ate our Ramen and promptly fell into a deep deep sleep.

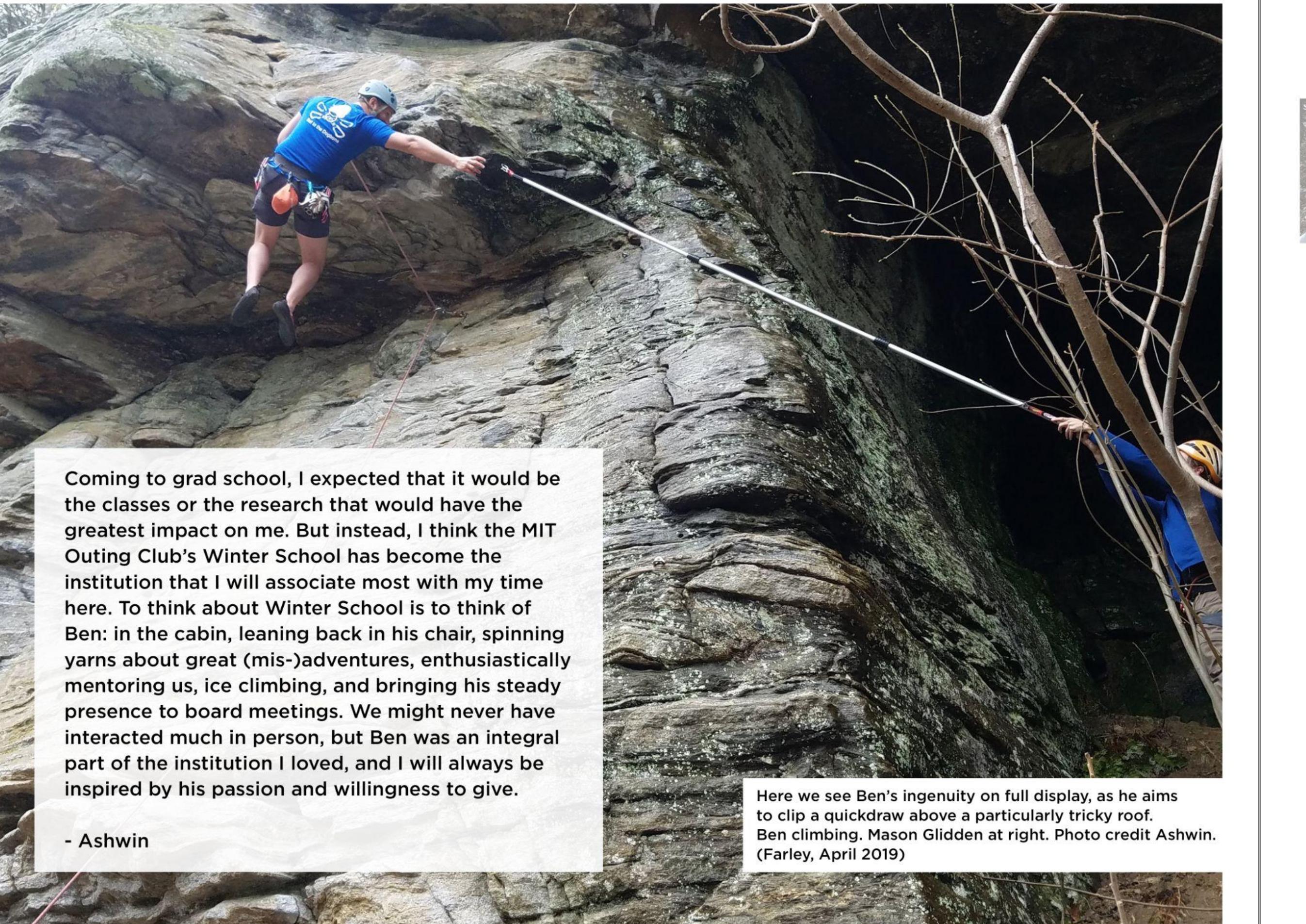
- Brian Nelson
(Sept. 12, 2020)



Pitch 2 on "The El" on Pitcho Cli in the Adirondaks. As Ben turned the corner he shook his head, looked back at me and said "You're not gonna like this, I'll keep it as a surprise". He was right, I didn't like it; It was busted #2 Golden Link Cam. Over cammed in a horizontal placement. Booty for the taking! Ben loved the link cams, marvelous pieces of engineering... when placed properly. Photo credit and climbing partner for this trip: Brian Nelson.
(Sept. 7, 2020)



(Sept. 7, 2020)



Coming to grad school, I expected that it would be the classes or the research that would have the greatest impact on me. But instead, I think the MIT Outing Club's Winter School has become the institution that I will associate most with my time here. To think about Winter School is to think of Ben: in the cabin, leaning back in his chair, spinning yarns about great (mis-)adventures, enthusiastically mentoring us, ice climbing, and bringing his steady presence to board meetings. We might never have interacted much in person, but Ben was an integral part of the institution I loved, and I will always be inspired by his passion and willingness to give.

- Ashwin

Here we see Ben's ingenuity on full display, as he aims to clip a quickdraw above a particularly tricky roof.
Ben climbing. Mason Glidden at right. Photo credit Ashwin.
(Farley, April 2019)

Winter hiking and fondue with Ben.
Photos courtesy Caroline and Klaus Bonazza.



Leading trips with Ben was a pleasure, sharing not only a great joy in being in the mountains together, but enjoying *Ben's truly unique humoristic easiness*.

Always there, whether he was enjoying helping with troubleshooting, or if there was something to fix or to come up with a great dinner for all of us, of course accompanying it with great jokes, and therewith swaying the group. Yes, we know that, but what was it in detail? It was his warm hearted, calm, smiling face.

- Caroline and Klaus Bonazza



No snow in the glades? Ben co-led a Winter School trip doing laps at Pat's Peak. It was apparently a hit, as evidenced by the 1:1 leader to participant ratio. According to Evan Williams, this was the day Ben and Evan checked out Tele skis for the fun of it, and Ben tried to teach her to Tele while they were simultaneously leading the trip.

Ben at center front. James Hermus also attended. Evan Williams and Alex Garcia at right.

Photo credit Dan Anderson.

(Feb. 2, 2020)



Ben with Suzy McKinney hiking the Moats when she had just arrived back in the US. It was a beautiful day.
(Feb. 17, 2020)



Practicing self-rescue skills with Ben and Mason Glidden.
Photo credit Cole Crawford.
(Aug. 27, 2020)

I first met Ben Kessel driving up to Camelot for a Circus. Ben had volunteered to purchase food for a large group of MITOCers for the weekend, and when I pulled up to Market Basket, he was waiting with two carts full of mac and cheese, donuts, and other similarly healthy sustenance. Though my Kia Rio was no larger than his current ride, a battered Dodge Neon, it was far more trustworthy – Ben was always quick to carpool. I was just getting involved with MITOC and beginning to climb, and I spent the two hour drive to New Hampshire engrossed in his stories of worldwide travel in search of sweeping rock, new friends and cultures, and of course, fantastic food and drink.

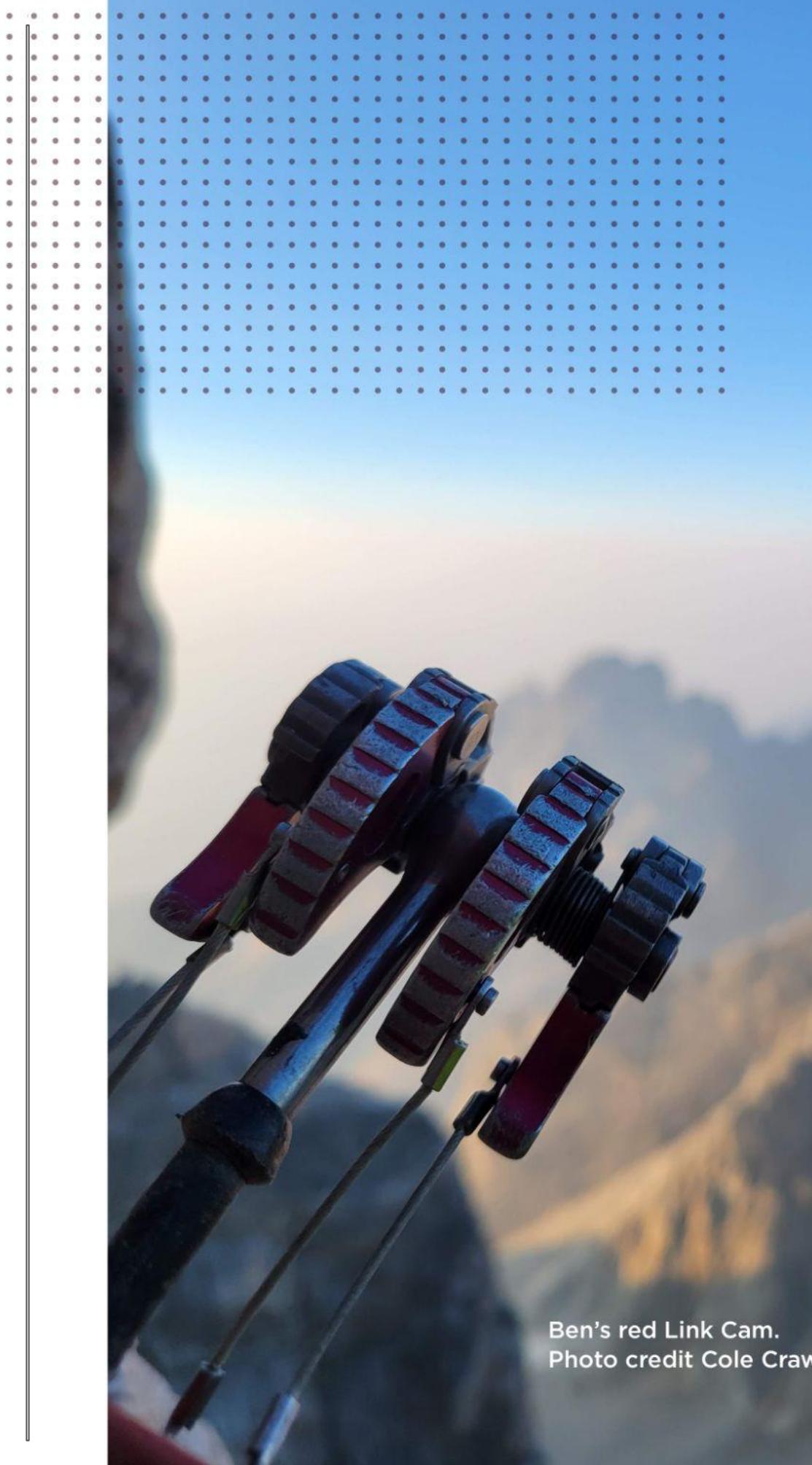
That ride was the start of a close friendship with one of the most genuine, caring, and quirky individuals I have ever met. Ben was not only a climber and an engineer, but a thoughtful teacher. A few weeks later, Mason, Ben, and I loaded up the Kia to go to the Gunks over Indigenous People's Day. Despite a soggy forecast, I learned more from Ben about climbing in that one weekend than I have in any similar span since. We clambered up easy, damp climbs in the Near Trapps, discovered Ben's animal doppelganger (a wrinkled, fluffy orange Chow Chow named Leo), and scarfed down waffles at Ben's favorite New Paltz establishment, the B-Side Grill. On our last day there I convinced him to let me lead Madame Grunnebaum's Waltz, which features a long and stunning second pitch up a beautiful orange buttress. As a new leader, I took a full hour to bring him and Mason up, but he never complained, only gently suggesting a better anchor for next time. Madame G is my favorite easy climb anywhere, and I've returned to it half a dozen times

since, but nothing can top my memories of the first time questing up it with Ben.

Over the next two years, Ben became a fixture in my outdoor experience. I was always trying to push myself harder, but Ben had been there and done that. He could still dance his way up slabs and swim up cracks, but crimps and overhangs hurt his fingers and shoulders. That didn't matter to Ben: he was just as content hanging in a hammock as on the cliff, and always ready to share (or snag) a beer back at the cabin in his favorite easy chair. More than anyone, he knew how to suck the marrow out of life. Whether it was self-rescue practice in the park, finding a Goldilocks Gunks roof (not too easy, not too hard, aka 5.8), night skiing followed by sleeping in our cars in the Pat's Peak parking lot, staying at his family condo and hiking during COVID, silently watching the sunset, or drinking G&P (gin and Pepsi) during Halloween charades, Ben made every moment he touched better.

I recently traveled to Wyoming and climbed some alpine routes. I carry him and his teaching with me every time I start up a route. Mason and I racked Ben's funky red Link Cam as we summited the Grand Teton and Pingora in the Winds, finding places for it below tenuous cruxes and in exposed anchors where nothing else would fit. Nobody else can replace Ben for me either. Thank you for your knowledge, your generosity, your friendship, mountain man Ben.

- Cole Crawford



Ben's red Link Cam.
Photo credit Cole Crawford.



Ben with Cole Crawford.
(Feb. 22, 2019)



Alex Garcia with Ben
in Franconia, NH.
(May 4, 2019)

Some of my fondest memories with Ben are the silly adventures we had. Once, Ben and I were co-leading a trad climbing trip and Ben was adamant that we minimize driving even if it minimized the climbing. We went to Rumney to explore the few trad climbs there and dragged our participants up a muddy, slippery, leafy gully in search of a climb that was actually at the base of the gully. We chuckled, descended the gully, and found a different climb. Another time, we forgot what spring conditions were like in the White Mountains. At the car, upon viewing the melting piles of snow, Ben put on shoes — a statement in itself. We spent the next hours

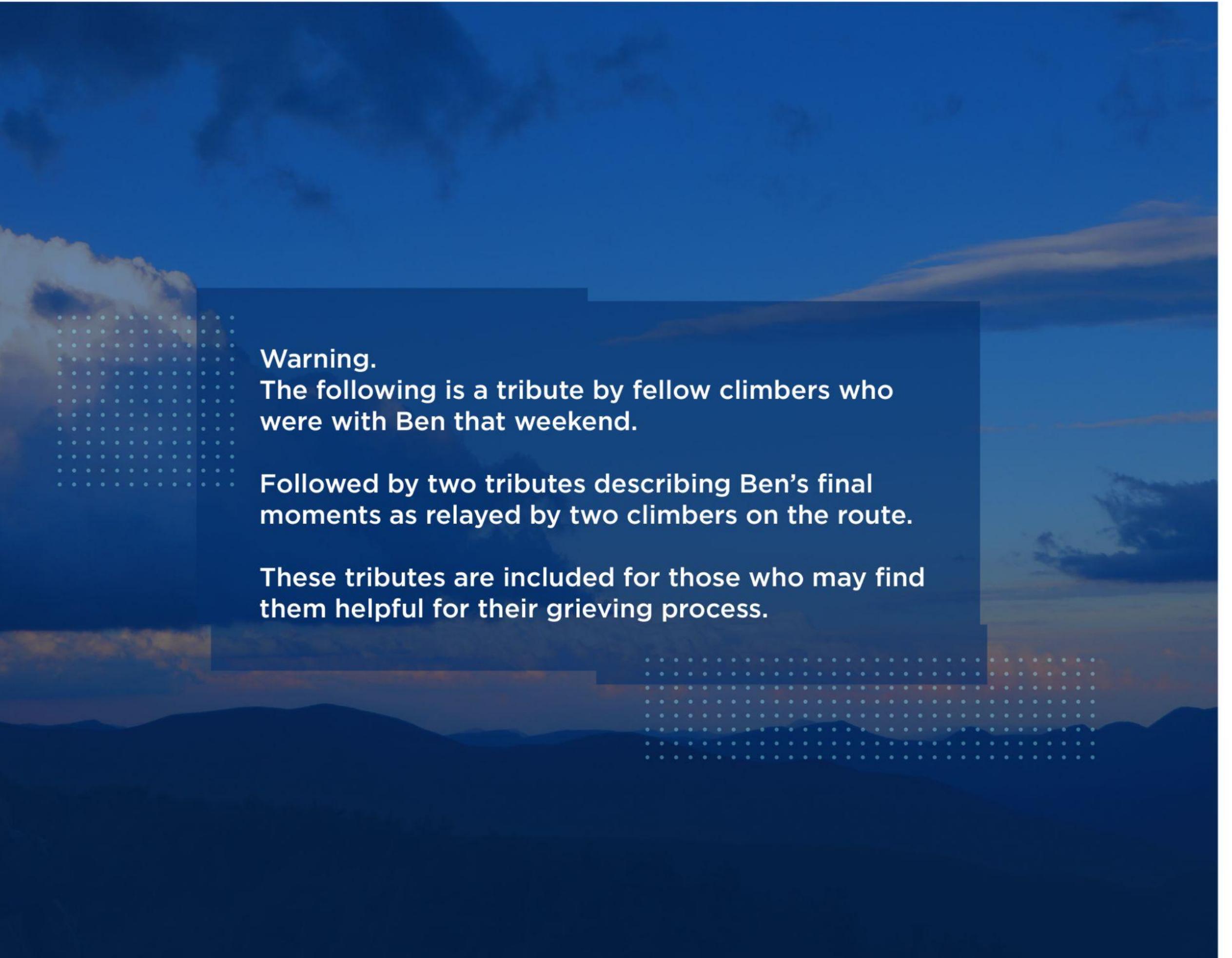


MITOC Rock Program (School of Rock)
Alex Garcia, Shayna, Etha Williams,
Nico, Aileen Devlin, Dan Anderson,
Ben, Julian Kwan, Anastasia Karimova,
Isaac Han, Louisa French in Erving, MA.
(June 9, 2019)

attempting to balance along a thin monorail of packed snow, but mostly post-holing up to our thighs and wallowing in the unconsolidated snow. I remember cracking jokes and laughing with Ben over the absurdity of the situation. He made these objectively demoralizing adventures something to smile about.

- Alex Garcia



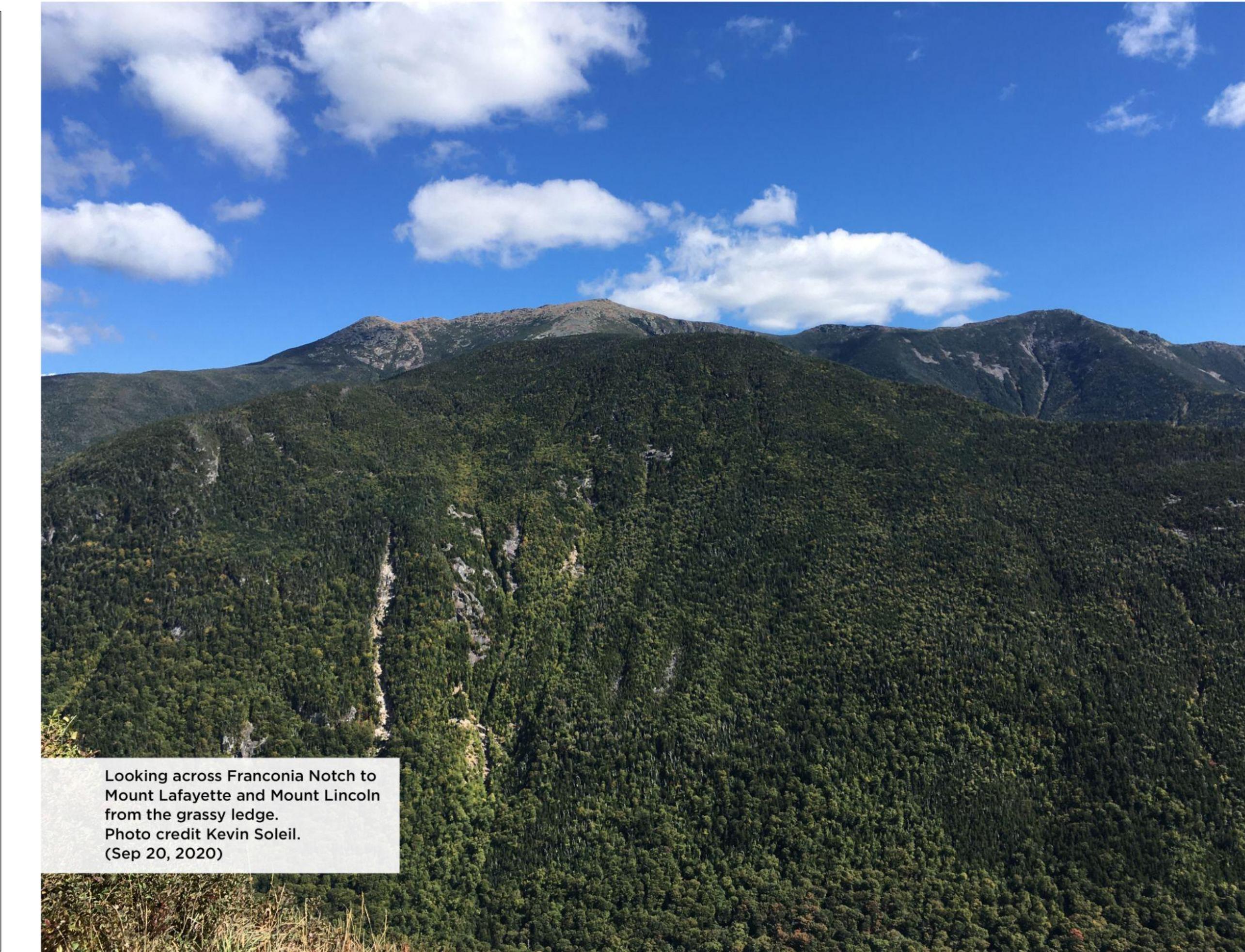


Warning.

The following is a tribute by fellow climbers who were with Ben that weekend.

Followed by two tributes describing Ben's final moments as relayed by two climbers on the route.

These tributes are included for those who may find them helpful for their grieving process.



It was a beautiful early Fall weekend in New Hampshire. The trees were just starting to turn red with a hint of Fall foliage. It was spectacular.

Emma and Ben drove out from Boston on Saturday morning, fueled by delicious cider donuts, which Ben, and Emma, loved a lot.

Emma, Angie, Mike, Ben and I all climbed at Echo Crag on Saturday. Ben suspended his hammock like usual and we all spent a lot of time hanging out and chilling. It was a really nice day. It was relaxing, friends just hanging out, attempting the occasional climb. I have really lovely memories of that day.

On Saturday evening, we found a secret free camping spot. Dinner time came, and I had only brought dehydrated instant mashed potatoes. Ben had brought Ramen. Emma really likes cooking, and decided to lead us in the cooking of a proper camp meal. We made a delicious meal with pasta, fresh veggies, tempeh and two types of cheese.

Emma asked me, "How much pasta should we cook, of the packet?" and of course Ben responded, "Well, clearly all of it!". We didn't quite manage to finish it.

It was a really nice evening with friends, and a beautiful sunset. The moon came out. Ben was committed to sleeping in his hammock, even though the temperature was below freezing. I don't think he regretted it at all.

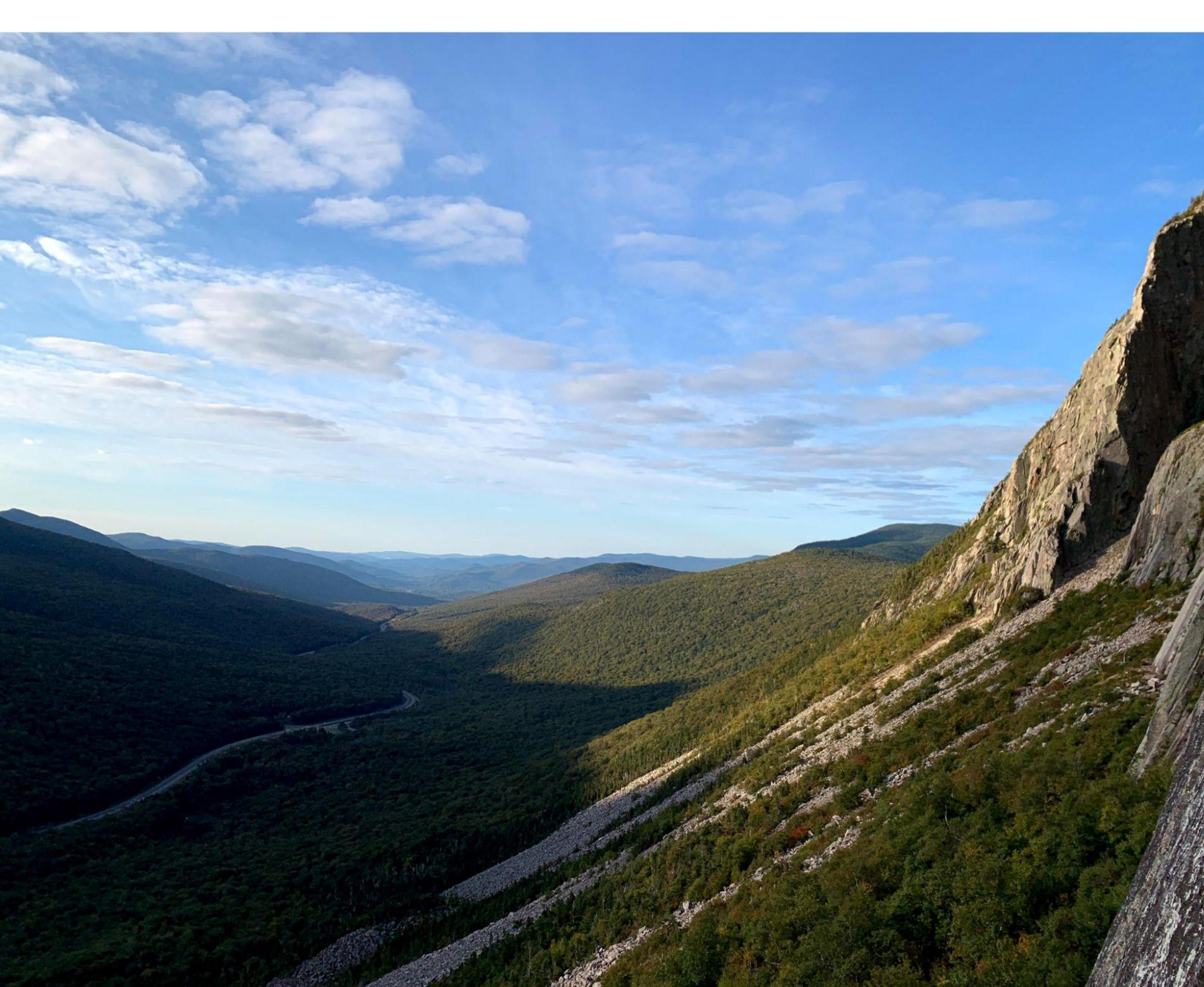
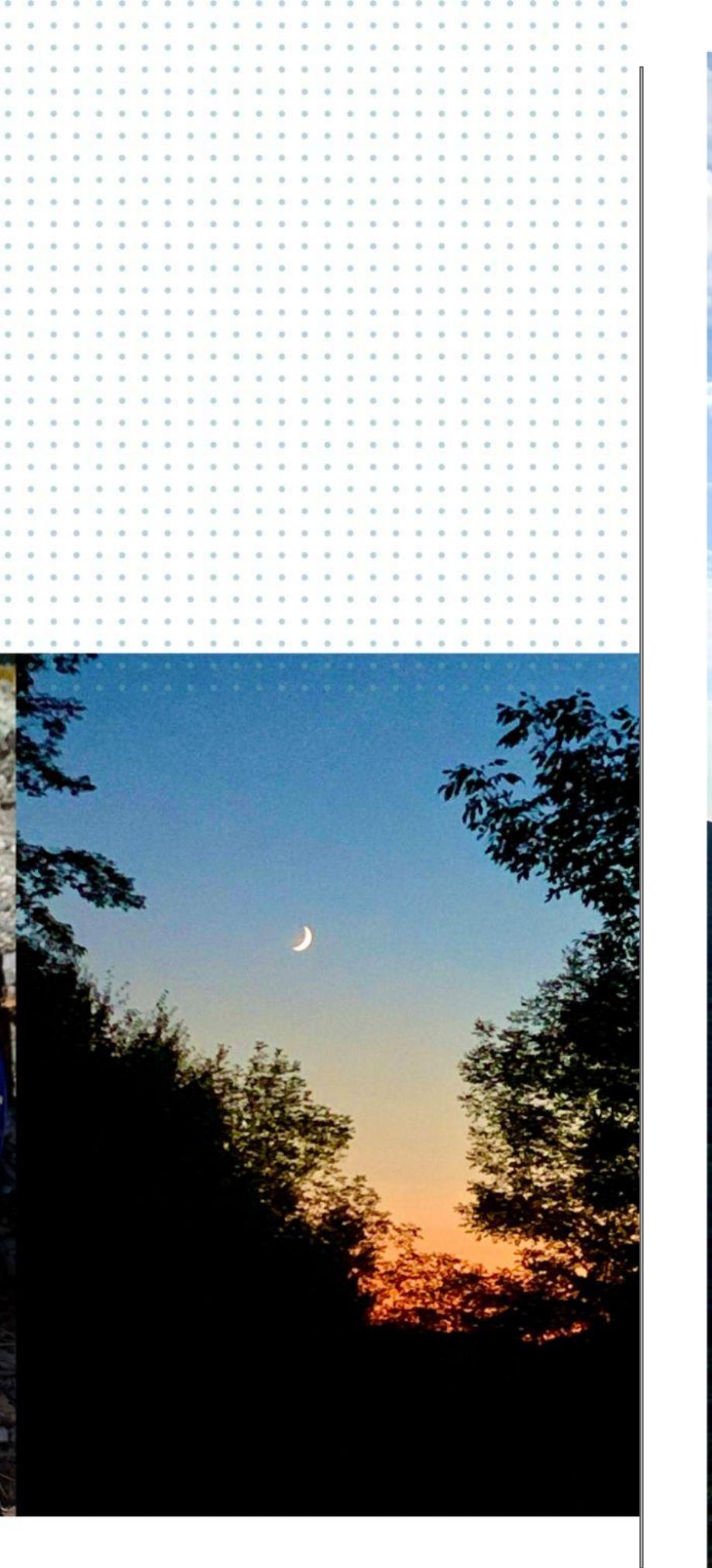
Sunday was a spectacular fall day in New England. We ate donuts for breakfast. Ben was so happy that weekend. He was really stoked to be outside, to be climbing with his friends.

- Suzy

Ben came on this trip with me because we wanted to be really safe. We had been planning it for a month and meeting up practicing self rescue in the park, talking about risk management and tolerance. Every decision we made on the route we made together. And he made me feel so safe and I will never forget that. He made me laugh so much. Even though I didn't know him as well as so many others, I felt like I'd finally broken through, and started to see this man and how his smile would just light up the room. I just wanted to get to know him more and more. Hearing all of these stories about him, I'm truly grateful for.

- Emma





**Kevin Soleil and William Moriarty - climbers on the route
with Ben and Emma. (Sept. 20, 2020)**

I stood at the final belay station for the climb Moby Grape. It was my first time on Cannon Cliff, and it was a dream come true for me. Kevin, my climbing partner, was on the other end of the rope finishing up the Kurt's corner variation. Ben was off to my far right, just about to start his final ascent up the standard finish of Moby Grape. I didn't know Ben, I had followed on all the pitches so by the time I made it up to Kevin, Ben and Emma were usually set off on the next section. Kevin mentioned to me how they exchanged words, and how he was a great guy.

As Kevin was climbing I had watched as the shade started to engulf the cliff side, the sun was just over the top of the cliff, so its warmth could no longer be felt. Standing there noticing the cold creeping up on me I had a conversation with Ben, soon to find out it would be the only conversation I'd ever have with him. I don't remember exactly everything that was exchanged, but I know it started with me saying "I really miss the sun". We talked briefly before he started his ascent, but he left me with something along the lines of "The sun is waiting for us at the top" with a large smile on his face. Ben started to climb after that, as I waited for Kevin to put me on belay I started to shiver.

Then I heard "ROCK" and as I turned my head I watched Ben enter my vision from above me, falling, a large boulder following him. Then he disappeared below.

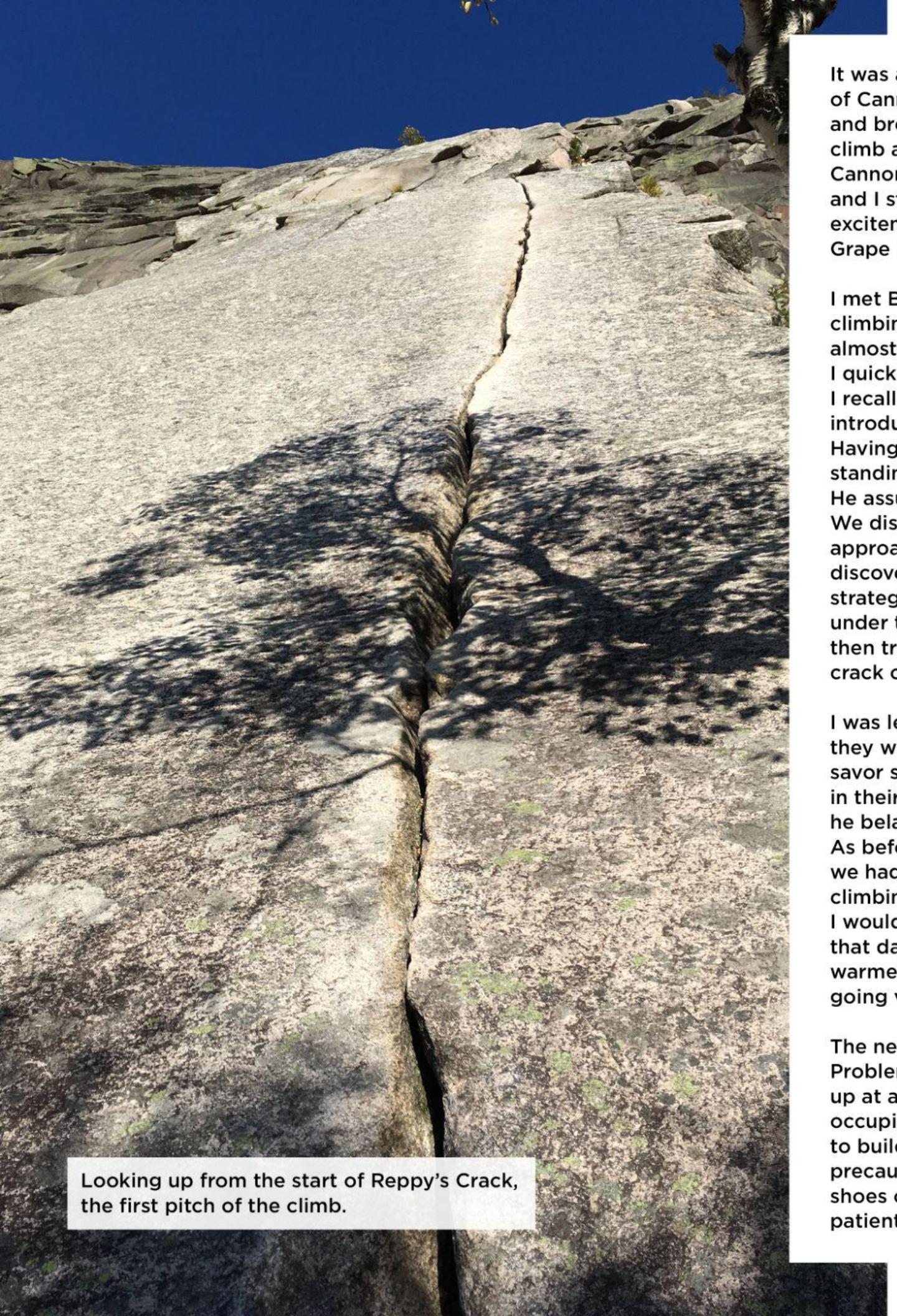
- Bill Moriarty



8:30 AM - Ascending towards Moby Grape. Ben's red shirt can be made out slightly left of the "knot" in the cliff.



Ben patiently belaying his partner from the large grassy ledge below "The Cave".



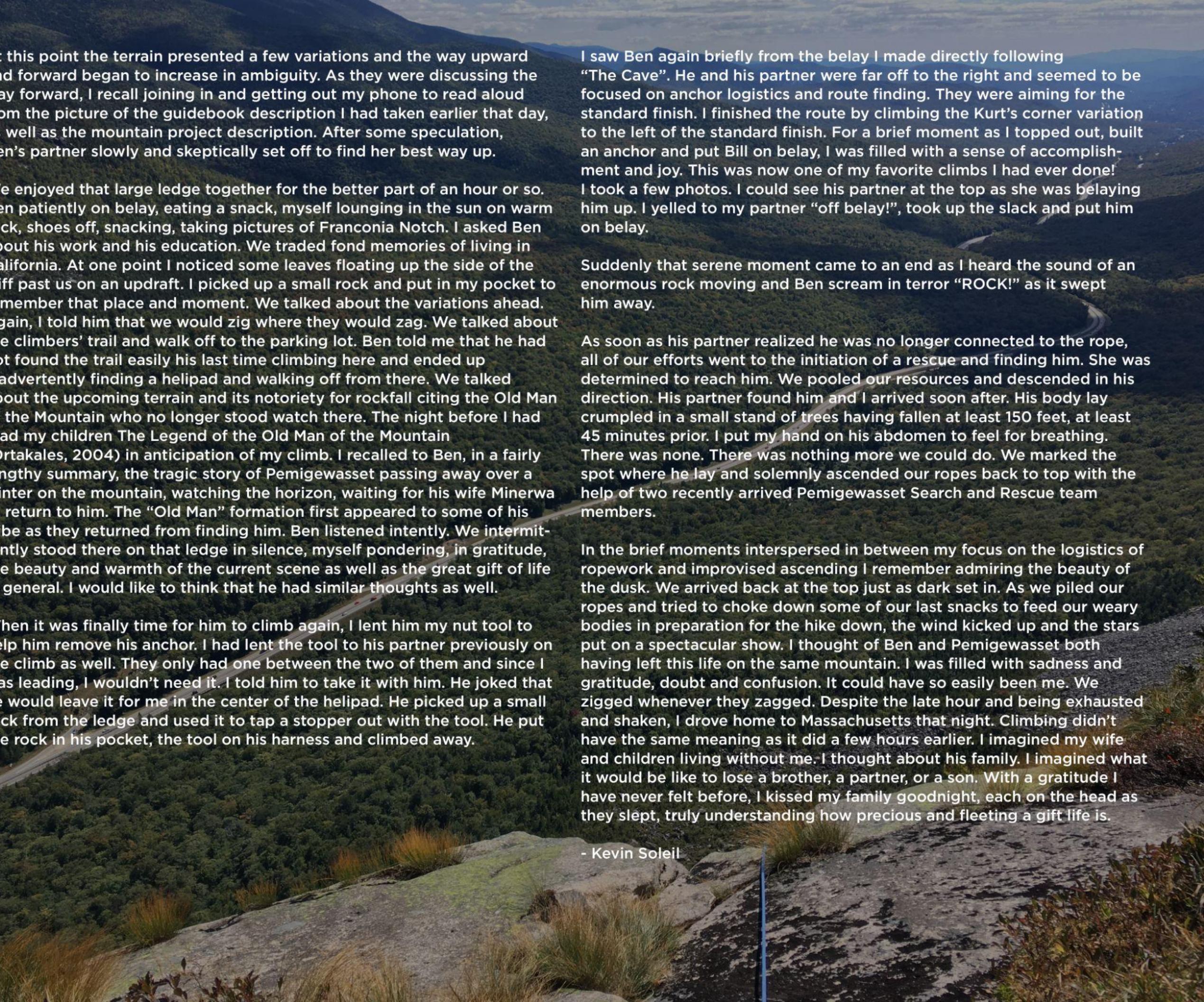
Looking up from the start of Reppy's Crack, the first pitch of the climb.

It was a cold morning in the shade at the climbers' parking lot at the base of Cannon Mountain. The weather for the day was predicted to be clear and breezy with highs in the mid 40s (F). I was part excited for the day's climb and part apprehensive given the day's weather prediction, and Cannon's size and reputation for rockfall. As Bill, my climbing partner, and I started up the talus field the morning sun warmed the air and excitement took over. As we approached our climb for the day, Moby Grape 5.8 III, we could see the red shirt of one of a party already on it.

I met Benjamin Kessel on the final day of his life, happily perched with his climbing partner on the belay below the triangle roof. I climbed up to almost where they were and made an anchor below and to the right. I quickly gave a big smile with a friendly hello and introduced myself. I recall him saying hello in a reserved and matter of fact way and introducing himself as well. I may have even had to ask him his name. Having just climbed over some loose rock and seeing more where I was standing, I asked him about the ground he was standing on above me. He assured me that nothing would be coming down on me from his stance. We discussed the terrain leading up to where we were and our differing approaches to climbing it. With that, we were on good terms. When he discovered that it was my first time on the route the discussion shifted to strategy and variations for the features and challenges ahead. There, from under the triangle roof, I watched them climb one variation up and left, then traversing high and right. I took another variation, climbing a finger crack out right and up to below the roof before going over it.

I was leading all the pitches that day and we were climbing faster than they were. Rather than work out the logistics to overtake them, I opted to savor some downtime at each belay. Ben was mentoring his partner which, in their case, meant that she was leading all the difficult/fun sections while he belayed. I met up with him again under the "Finger of Fate" feature. As before, we discussed the terrain previous and the different variations we had each taken. Seeing that his partner had led the "Finger of Fate" climbing to the left and set him up to do the same, I playfully declared that I would climb every opposite variation of each feature I could behind them that day. I then climbed the hand traverse to the right. The weather had warmed up to be quite comfortable and enjoyable, and the climbing was going very smoothly for both of our parties.

The next time I encountered Ben was at a large ledge above the "Boulder Problem" pitch, a ways down from "The Cave". He and his partner were set up at a belay on the left side of the ledge. I came up to find that they had occupied the only good spot to belay from. Having found no other place to build an anchor and wanting to give them ample space due to pandemic precautions, I sat down on the large grassy sunny ledge, took my climbing shoes off, and happily waited basking in the sun with my partner, Bill patiently waiting at the boulder problem anchor below.



At this point the terrain presented a few variations and the way upward and forward began to increase in ambiguity. As they were discussing the way forward, I recall joining in and getting out my phone to read aloud from the picture of the guidebook description I had taken earlier that day, as well as the mountain project description. After some speculation, Ben's partner slowly and skeptically set off to find her best way up.

We enjoyed that large ledge together for the better part of an hour or so. Ben patiently on belay, eating a snack, myself lounging in the sun on warm rock, shoes off, snacking, taking pictures of Franconia Notch. I asked Ben about his work and his education. We traded fond memories of living in California. At one point I noticed some leaves floating up the side of the cliff past us on an updraft. I picked up a small rock and put in my pocket to remember that place and moment. We talked about the variations ahead. Again, I told him that we would zig where they would zag. We talked about the climbers' trail and walk off to the parking lot. Ben told me that he had not found the trail easily his last time climbing here and ended up inadvertently finding a helipad and walking off from there. We talked about the upcoming terrain and its notoriety for rockfall citing the Old Man of the Mountain who no longer stood watch there. The night before I had read my children The Legend of the Old Man of the Mountain (Ortakales, 2004) in anticipation of my climb. I recalled to Ben, in a fairly lengthy summary, the tragic story of Pemigewasset passing away over a winter on the mountain, watching the horizon, waiting for his wife Minerwa to return to him. The "Old Man" formation first appeared to some of his tribe as they returned from finding him. Ben listened intently. We intermittently stood there on that ledge in silence, myself pondering, in gratitude, the beauty and warmth of the current scene as well as the great gift of life in general. I would like to think that he had similar thoughts as well.

When it was finally time for him to climb again, I lent him my nut tool to help him remove his anchor. I had lent the tool to his partner previously on the climb as well. They only had one between the two of them and since I was leading, I wouldn't need it. I told him to take it with him. He joked that he would leave it for me in the center of the helipad. He picked up a small rock from the ledge and used it to tap a stopper out with the tool. He put the rock in his pocket, the tool on his harness and climbed away.

I saw Ben again briefly from the belay I made directly following "The Cave". He and his partner were far off to the right and seemed to be focused on anchor logistics and route finding. They were aiming for the standard finish. I finished the route by climbing the Kurt's corner variation to the left of the standard finish. For a brief moment as I topped out, built an anchor and put Bill on belay, I was filled with a sense of accomplishment and joy. This was now one of my favorite climbs I had ever done! I took a few photos. I could see his partner at the top as she was belaying him up. I yelled to my partner "off belay!", took up the slack and put him on belay.

Suddenly that serene moment came to an end as I heard the sound of an enormous rock moving and Ben scream in terror "ROCK!" as it swept him away.

As soon as his partner realized he was no longer connected to the rope, all of our efforts went to the initiation of a rescue and finding him. She was determined to reach him. We pooled our resources and descended in his direction. His partner found him and I arrived soon after. His body lay crumpled in a small stand of trees having fallen at least 150 feet, at least 45 minutes prior. I put my hand on his abdomen to feel for breathing. There was none. There was nothing more we could do. We marked the spot where he lay and solemnly ascended our ropes back to top with the help of two recently arrived Pemigewasset Search and Rescue team members.

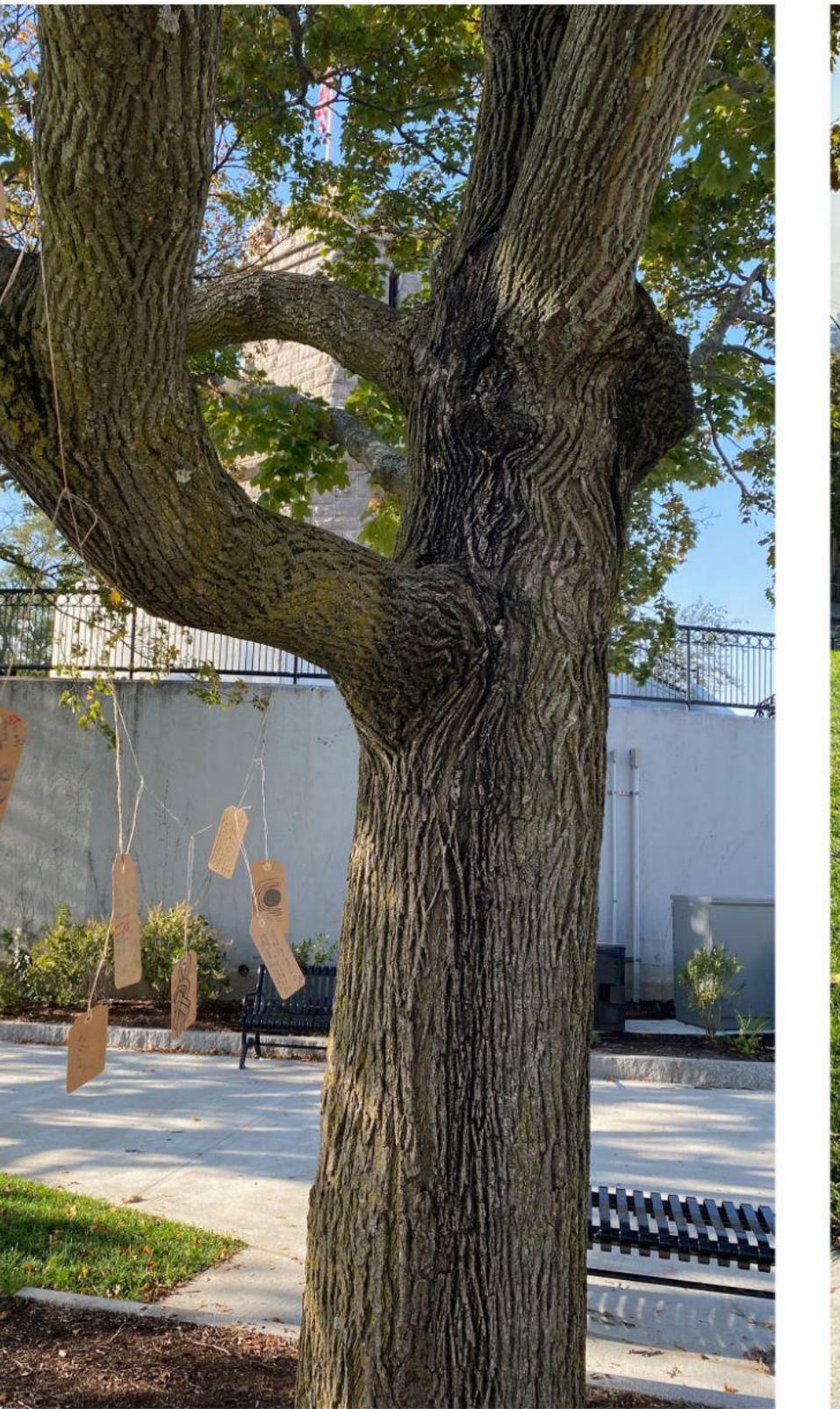
In the brief moments interspersed in between my focus on the logistics of ropework and improvised ascending I remember admiring the beauty of the dusk. We arrived back at the top just as dark set in. As we piled our ropes and tried to choke down some of our last snacks to feed our weary bodies in preparation for the hike down, the wind kicked up and the stars put on a spectacular show. I thought of Ben and Pemigewasset both having left this life on the same mountain. I was filled with sadness and gratitude, doubt and confusion. It could have so easily been me. We zipped whenever they zagged. Despite the late hour and being exhausted and shaken, I drove home to Massachusetts that night. Climbing didn't have the same meaning as it did a few hours earlier. I imagined my wife and children living without me. I thought about his family. I imagined what it would be like to lose a brother, a partner, or a son. With a gratitude I have never felt before, I kissed my family goodnight, each on the head as they slept, truly understanding how precious and fleeting a gift life is.

- Kevin Soleil





On Sunday September 27th, Alex Norby, who is a member of the MITOC community and an art therapist and somatic psychotherapist, held a community gathering focused on both honoring Ben's life and community healing. She first led a yoga flow and self compassion meditation in support of loss and grief. Then, in a nod to Ben's love of travel, blank luggage tags and art supplies were provided, for community members to create tributes. These tags were hung in Prospect Hill Park for a week, as an art installation to hold space for all to visit.



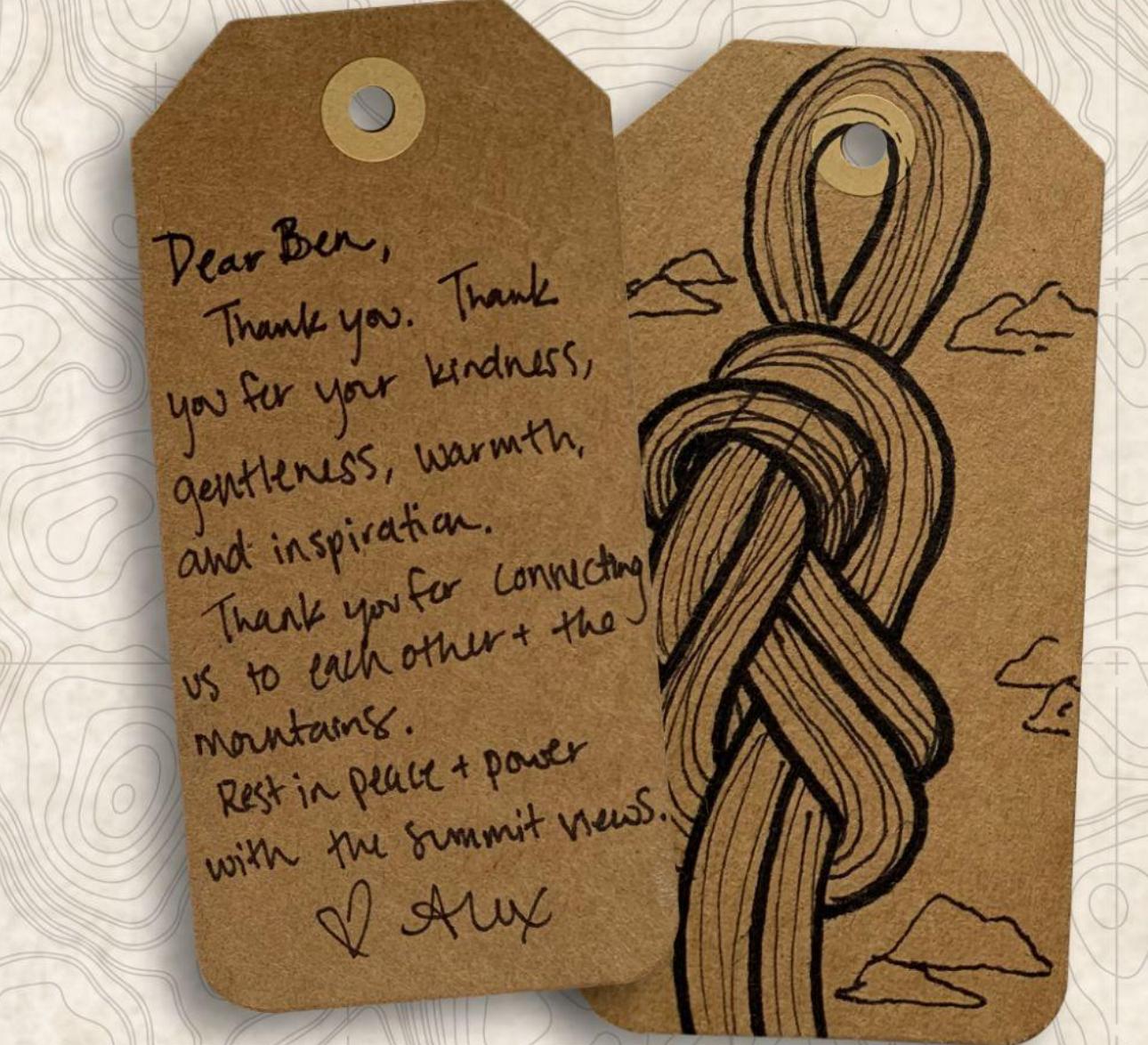


holding space for our pain + joy
for Ben

Ben, At first, I remembered all the words we shared - the bad jokes, the MITAC logistics, the gear talk, the banter. But when I dig deeper, what I really feel in my memories are the silences. You were so good at accepting, so patient with me. Remember that day at Rumney? I didn't have to explain, you just knew. And were

Silently supportive, always there to catch me or help if you could. I know you intellectually knew we cared about you, were so grateful for you. I told you sometimes & let you sputter in awkwardness. But I hope you felt it. Our lives won't be the same. There is a Ben-sized void that we will grow around, but never fill. I love and miss you,
Mountain Man Ben. ❤ -Asha

Ben, thank you for giving so much to our community. Your warmth, kindness, care, and generosity made our family stronger + more compassionate.



Dear Ben,
Thank you. Thank you for your kindness, gentleness, warmth, and inspiration.
Thank you for connecting us to each other + the mountains.
Rest in peace + power with the summit view.
♡ Alex

Your great humility, incredible respect for others, and calmness in stressful times are traits I so admire and hope to better emulate.







“Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.”

- Dr. Seuss