The air was so thin at 18,500 feet that each breath felt like a question: Why am I doing this?

It was summit night on Kilimanjaro, the first of my Seven Summits. I remember it vividly. I felt strong until I didn’t. Climbing through the darkness with Jeremiah, my guide, I watched silhouettes of other climbers pausing through the beam of my headlamp. Every step was laboured. Every decision questioned. And every breath, earned. The altitude demanded one thing: focus and endurance.

But let me take you back a decade. The version of me you see today didn’t exist in 2013. I was battling tuberculosis, had gone through four surgeries, was a bag of bones, going from 80kgs to 40kgs and could barely walk across a room. Climbing mountains? That was a reality too far. In fact, I wasn’t even aware that the Himalayas were accessible to people like me.

As all good stories go, it started with a call. Saketh, someone who had seen me through the best and worst, rang me one Monday afternoon while he was in office. I was on my bed, barely able to move. I still remember the ringtone: Enya’s Only Time. I forced myself to scoot over and answer it. I just wanted to hear a familiar voice, to not feel like I was still in the hospital.

After the usual check-in, “How are you feeling?”, he asked me for my credit card. “I need ₹4,000 to swipe on the YHAI website,” he said.

Curious, I asked why. He told me he wanted to climb a mountain called Sar Pass in Himachal through the Youth Hostels Association of India, and Rama, another friend, would join him. All I could think of was: The Himalayas, huh?

I recalled the geography map from school, the Himalayas tucked away in the top-right corner of the subcontinent. That was all I knew. And yet, that map… it suddenly felt like a possibility.

Back to the call, he said he’d pay me back in a month and told me to rest and recover. But something shifted. A tiny cog started spinning inside me. From hopelessness emerged a flicker of purpose. Maybe, I thought, just maybe… I could join them. It sounded impossible, but the words that came out of my mouth were:

“F\*\*k you. Even I want to join you.”

And that’s how it began. A phone call that would give me purpose, and a goal to stay alive and get strong again.

But I digress. You’ve come here to understand—why the Seven? Why not something else? If fitness was the goal, why not an Ironman?

I didn’t start climbing because I loved the mountains. I started climbing because I needed something, anything, that made me feel alive again. I remember those long, dragging months in hospital, reliant on medicines and daily injections to keep the virus away. I felt hopeless. Hollow. Disconnected.

But once my treatment ended, three years after it began in 2013, I made a choice. I would push my boundaries. I would go to the corners of the world I never imagined I’d see. I wasn’t chasing summits. I was chasing what would be a pursuit of life.

The Seven Summits wasn’t a grand plan. It was just something that gave me direction. A reason to move. But somewhere along the way, it became more than that. It gave me mornings worth waking up for. A sense of purpose. A reason not to give in to depression. A reason to test myself, not just physically, but emotionally, and intellectually too.

These mountains gave me a dream. A dream that took a boy, who had never left Hyderabad until the age of 22, and showed him the world. New cultures. New challenges. Loneliness. And heartbreak too, especially when I didn’t make it to the summit.

And maybe I still don’t know exactly why I climb…

But I know I’m not done.

Not yet!