

Everest for me, and I believe for the world, is the physical and symbolic manifestation of overcoming odds to achieve a dream. There was never a question in my mind that I wanted to climb that mountain, no matter what other people said.

My first climb was in primary school, Mount Nasu. I was so surprised by the rocky dry hills, and streams of hot water that came from the springs. I realized that there are so many things in the world which I have never encountered, and that it is fun to see and learn directly through one's own experience. So, I became determined to go wherever I could go.

In Fukushima at that time, there were not many girls who went to high school, and hardly any went to university. I was an exceptional case and went to Tokyo to study English Literature. I felt a kind of inferiority complex about my speaking with a Fukushima accent because most female students were from cities. I was lucky to find a friend on campus who would go to the mountains with me, and we hiked together many times.

When I met a group of male students, and learned they were in an alpine club; I felt so envious. I began to dream about going to the Himalayas with a team of only women. You had to be a registered member of the Japan Mountaineering Association. For that reason, we formed the 'Ladies Climbing Club'. We were not accepted the first time. Later, however, we became recognized, which made the first 1970 Annapurna expedition possible.

When we started talking about an Everest expedition, most of the men in the alpine community were against our plan, saying that it would be impossible for a women's-only expedition. We applied for a climbing permit in 1971 but had to wait four years to receive a place in the formal climbing schedule.

Finding sponsors was not easy. We were frequently told that women should be raising children, not climbing mountains, but we were able to obtain last-minute funding from the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper and Nippon Television. Still, each of us had to come up with an additional 1.5 million yen on our own. I taught piano lessons to raise money and made much of my own equipment from scratch - waterproof gloves out of the covering of my car - and sewed trousers from old curtains.

Finally, in May of 1975, myself and fourteen other women began our ascent accompanied by journalists, a television camera crew and six Sherpa guides.

Shortly after midnight on May 4th at 6,300 meters, five of us were sleeping in a tent at Camp 2. Without any warning an avalanche struck, and I was completely buried in the snow, tangled in the tent, pushed under the other four women. I began to suffocate, and I thought about how our accident would be reported. Then suddenly, I was pulled out by Sherpas and revived. It was lucky, none of us had been seriously injured but it still took three days before I could walk and move normally.

The party leader and the party doctor at Base Camp both insisted we should all go down, but we decided to go higher. Technique and ability alone do not get you to the top; it is the willpower that is most important. This willpower you cannot buy with money or be given by others - it rises from your heart.

When we came upon Camp 4, we found that half of the Sherpas were suffering altitude sickness and could not carry enough oxygen bottles for the final-attack team of three to make it to the summit. It was decided I should go, and I left alone, with just my Sherpa guide. The summit was very narrow, a sharp ridge of ice. I had to crawl along it sideways. The two contrasting views of the flat and brown Tibetan highs, and rock glacier view of Nepal was impressive. I didn't shout or anything, but I thought: 'Oh, I don't have to climb

anymore.'

I prefer to be remembered as the thirty-sixth person to summit Everest. I did not intend to be the first woman. I can't understand why men make all this fuss - I simply climbed a mountain.

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