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Peak

by Roland Smith

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Summary



When Peak Marcello is caught climbing the Woolworth Building in New York City in an attempt to put graffiti on it, he faces serious consequences. A few days later, another boy falls to his death while committing a copycat crime, so prosecutors want Peak to go to jail for three years. Instead, he is offered a deal: if he leaves New York and goes to live with his father in Chiang Mai, Thailand, he will get probation and a fine.

Unbeknownst to Peak, however, his father, a famous mountain climber, has other plans for him. Joshua Wood, who owns a mountain climbing company called Peak Experience, wants his son to be the youngest person to climb Mount Everest. Josh explains to Peak that they will be climbing the Tibetan side of the mountain. After they arrive in Kathmandu, Josh goes ahead to meet his clients at Base Camp and leaves Peak in the care of Zopa, a Buddhist monk who will take him into Tibet and on to Base Camp. At the hotel, Peak also meets a boy named Sun-jo who is the son of a Sherpa.

Peak, Sun-jo, and Zopa cross into Tibet and go to Base Camp. There, Peak sees a small town of tents and people. He meets Holly Angelo, a reporter who covered his crime in New York and who now wants to write about his Everest attempt, and a film crew that will be filming his attempt. Peak begins the process of acclimatization to higher and higher altitudes. When a storm traps climbers from another party higher on the mountain, some of them are stricken with high altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE), a potentially fatal condition. Peak helps bring them down.

Peak finds out more about Sun-jo's past: He is Zopa's grandson, and he was born in Tibet. He had been going to school in India with his sisters, but he has had to return to Nepal due to lack of money. He was able to sneak into Tibet thanks to forged papers, but he is vulnerable to arrest at any time. Zopa, Josh, and Peak have to keep Sun-jo from being discovered by Captain Shek and other Chinese soldiers. Peak also discovers something else important about Sun-jo: He, like Peak, is fourteen years old (although Sun-jo is six days older). If either of them makes it to the summit, they will hold the title of the youngest person ever to ascend the mountain.

When four German climbers die attempting the summit, the life-and-death nature of the climb becomes clear to Peak. He also finds out that Sun-jo's father died saving Josh's life. When Josh's paying clients become upset when they find out Peak is going to the summit, Josh suddenly tells Peak he can't go and orders Zopa to take the boys back to Kathmandu. On the road, however, Zopa reveals a secret plan: He and two other Sherpas will take the boys to the top via a different, more difficult, route.

Captain Shek becomes suspicious and has high-altitude climbers trucked in to look for Sun-jo. When Zopa becomes sick high on the mountain, he reveals the final part of the plan: The two boys will ascend the summit and go down the mountain on the Nepalese side in order to get Sun-jo to safety. When Peak and Sun-jo are just short of the summit, Peak makes a choice that will affect the courses of both of their lives.



About the Author

I was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. When I was five years old my parents gave me an old manual typewriter that weighed more than I did! It was my favorite possession. I spent hours in my room clacking away on that old typewriter. Of course, when I was five I didn't know how to spell and I barely knew how to read, but I loved the sound and the look of the letters on the crisp white paper.



Things haven't changed much since then. I still spend several hours a day in my room clacking away and I still love the sound of the keyboard and the look of the letters and words that eventually turn into stories. The only difference is that I can read now and I spell a lot better.

Wanting to write led me to working with animals. I was going to Portland State University majoring in English so I could become a writer. One day I was looking at the job placement board hoping to find part-time work and I saw an opening at the children's zoo in town. I got the job. Soon after I started at the zoo, two agoutis escaped from their cage and disappeared into the park surrounding the zoo. Agoutis are very large rodents from South America. My boss told me to go out into the park and catch them. I didn't know at the time, but she was playing a joke on me. Everyone thought the agoutis would never be seen again. I not only found the agoutis, but I managed to catch them and bring them back to the zoo. My boss was shocked!

Another time I was walking through the zoo with the Animal Keeper Foreman. We came around a corner just as someone accidentally let a Myna bird out of a cage. Without thinking, I jumped up and caught it with my bare hands and put it back in the cage. Catching these animals was pure luck, but the Zoo Foreman was so impressed he offered me a full-time Animal Keeper position in the BIG zoo. I accepted thinking that I'd work there for a year or two and perhaps my experiences would make good material for a book. Little did I know that I would be working with animals for over twenty years and that the work would take me all over the world. I continued to practice

my writing while I worked in the zoo, but it was hard because my animal work took a lot of time. Eventually, I published a few books and I left the zoo so I could write full-time.

My wife, Marie, and I live on a small farm south of Portland. I spend my days in my basement office writing stories that usually include animals. If I'm not writing I'm traveling -- doing research and taking photos for upcoming books. Or, I'm out visiting schools -- something I love to do! My writing led me to animals and my work with animals led me back to writing. It's funny how things work out. I spent over twenty years working with animals. Now I'm going to spend the next twenty years writing about animals...as well as a few other things.



Book Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 6 Up—In this high-altitude adventure, 14-year-old Peak Marcello's passion for climbing is clearly in the genes, but when he is arrested for scaling tall buildings, his mom and stepdad make a deal with the judge to ship him out of the country to live with her ex-husband and squelch the media attention that might inspire "Spider Boy" copycats. The teen's father, Josh, and his Himalayan expedition company are preparing teams to climb Mount Everest and suddenly Peak is faced with the possibility of becoming the youngest climber to reach the summit. Excited about the adventure, he learns that Josh may have less-than-fatherly motives involving publicity and financial gain for his company, at the expense of his paying customers. Peak is handed off to his father's head Sherpa for training and altitude acclimation with a Nepalese boy his own age, named Sun-jo. At the same time, a media crew gathers at base camp to witness the climb, and an overzealous Chinese police captain doggedly searches for passport violations and underage climbers. Facts about Mount Everest, base camps, and the dangers of climbing are plentiful, depicting an international culture made up of individuals who are often self-absorbed and indifferent to the Tibetan Sherpas, who risk their lives for them. Peak's empathy for Sun-jo helps him make a critical decision as they near the summit, revealing his emotional growth and maturity. A well-crafted plot and exotic setting give the novel great appeal to survival adventure fans.—*Vicki Reutter, Cazenovia High School, NY*



Discussion Questions

Warning! Some of the questions contain key elements of the plot. Do not read if you don't want to know what happens!

- ◆ What happened to Peak's cheek and ear when he was climbing the skyscraper? What is "tagging"?
- ◆ When did Peak truly feel regret and shame for having "tagged" the buildings?
- ◆ Why did the judge agree to Peak leaving with his dad?
- ◆ Why did Josh bring Peak with him to Everest? Why was there a film crew on Everest?
- ◆ Why is climbing Everest not a competition between Peak and Sun-jo but a battle against life and death?
- ◆ Peak has no grades at his school. If you did not get a grade for any of your work or your classes, what would change?
- ◆ What does Roland Smith mean by "the point is that we won't know what the story is about until we know how the story ends"?
- ◆ Zopa compliments Peak at the end of a climb and Peak says it was "a whole tank of O's flowing into my bloodstream." How do compliments make you feel? Why are they so important?
- ◆ Does Joshua Woods love Peak? Is he a good father?
- ◆ What character is the most memorable?
- ◆ What is significant about Roland Smith's statement, "You don't have to be alone to feel alone?"
- ◆ What types of changes did Peak experience physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially?
- ◆ How does the phone call from Peak's mom change him?
- ◆ What changed at the summit of Everest?
- ◆ Why is climbing a "solo" sport? What does it take to get to the top of Everest?
- ◆ Why is 26,000 feet considered to be the "death zone"?
- ◆ Do you think it was a wise decision for Peak to go with his father?

Source:

<http://www.rolandsmith.com/curriculum/peak/Student%20Pack.pdf>



Author Interview

<http://www.rolandsmith.com/>

When did you first know that you wanted to be a writer?

Unconsciously, I think, before I even learned how to read. I loved books—not the illustrations...those funny little black symbols on the page, which I later learned with letters, words, sentences, paragraphs. When I learned to read I KNEW I wanted to become a writer. And here's a confession from my childhood. I loved the way books smelled. I was a book sniffer.

Can you tell us a little bit about your road to publishing?

It was long. I wrote almost every day for nearly 20 years and sent in stacks of manuscripts, and even larger stacks of rejection letters, before my first book, *Sea Otter Rescue*, was published in 1990. After this I wrote a number of non-fiction books, but my dream was to write novels. The first, *Thunder Cave*, came out in 1995. There have been many novels since then, and many more to come.

What, or who, has been the greatest inspiration for your stories?

It's not a who or a what. Being a lifelong reader has been my greatest inspiration. I read 2 or 3 books a week and I've done that for over 40 years. I learn something every time I read someone else's books.

Let's hear about your family, who I'm sure are thrilled to have a published author among them!

I have three wonderful stepchildren, and four very cool grandsons. And yes they are happy "Gramps" is an author.

Now for some fun facts. What's your greatest comfort food?

I love all food that starts with the letter "P". I also love egg salad sandwiches and grilled cheese sandwiches.

What are the first three things you do when you wake up in the morning?

Brush my teeth. Drink Coffee. Write.

If I came to your house and looked in your closet/attic/basement, what's the one thing that would surprise me the most?

It would not be a surprise if I told you.

Everyone asks the question about "if you could be a tree, which tree would you be?" so I want to know: If you could be a color, which color would it be, and why?

I have no idea.

Who is your favorite cartoon character?

I don't have one.

Which cartoon character is most like you?

I don't watch cartoons...well sometimes with my grandsons, but truthfully I don't pay much attention. I watch my grandson's watching cartoons. I don't watch much television. I'm too busy writing and reading.

If you could beam yourself to anywhere in the world ("Beam me up, Scotty!"), during any time in history, where and when would it be—and why?

I would like to go back to the Lewis and Clark Expedition (which I wrote about in The Captain's Dog) when Captain Lewis found the Great Falls. That was probably the most wonderful day of his life.

So what's your favorite type of music to listen to?

I like almost all types of music.

Favorite musical artists?

Too many to name.

Do you listen to music while you're writing?

I sometimes listen to jazz or classical when I write, but I can't listen to music with lyrics when I write because hearing the words while I'm trying to write words is too confusing.

Do you have any favorite T.V. shows?

American Idol.

Movies you watch over and over again?

A lot of them. But if I had to choose a favorite, which would be hard, it would be Patton with George C. Scott.

What was the last movie you saw at the theater?

I saw the latest James Bond film with my son-in-law, which I liked, but I can't remember the name of it. Terrible I know.

You have the chance to give one piece of advice to your teen readers. What would it be?

Read and write everyday for the rest of your life. Reading will change your life for the better, it has changed him dramatically.

One last question. What stories can we look forward to from you in the future?

Too many to name. I will have two or three novels coming out every year for the next several years.

Source: <http://www.teensreadtoo.com/>



Further Reading

If you liked **PEAK** by Roland Smith,
you might like to read the following books, too!

FAR NORTH by Will Hobbs
THE WHITE DARKNESS by Geraldine McCaughrean
FREE RADICAL by Claire Rudolf Murphy
THE MAESTRO by Tim Wynne-Jones
THE SKULL MANTRA by Eliot Pattison
INTO THIN AIR by Jon Krakauer
**MIRACLE IN THE ANDES: 72 DAYS ON THE MOUNTAIN AND MY
LONG TREK HOME** by Nando Parrado