

DAWN GLANC

Like many climbers, I have a love/hate relationship with ice climbing. On one hand I love the beauty, the outrageous situations, and the surreal terrain ice climbers explore. On the other hand, I'm concerned by the risk inherent in climbing such a fragile, dynamic medium and the potential for long, potentially catastrophic, falls.

Outside climbing, most people consider *all* climbers to be a bit touched in the head but ice climbers even more. Then there's mixed climbing, using ice axes and crampons to climb rock where there's no ice at all! That's a level of crazy that makes even most climbers shake their heads.

And I was one of them, until I had the opportunity to watch Dawn Glanc in action. Prior to seeing Dawn mixed climb, I didn't get it. I was one of those people who couldn't stand the sound (reminiscent of fingernails on a chalkboard) of crampon points grating over bare rock.

And I love my ice tools! I wince every time I swing too hard on thin ice, and the pick rebounds in a shower of sparks. Why subject my lovely axes and crampons to naked rock where there's no ice at all?

But after watching Dawn perform her vertical ballet, gracefully linking sections of ice and rock, I began to understand the aesthetics and admire the incredible precision required to *gently*



position crampon points and the picks of the two axes on tiny, nearly imperceptible placements, as well as the stillness of body and mind required to move with exquisite delicacy between sequences. After witnessing Dawn's mastery, I began to see mixed climbing, which I'd previously considered to be perhaps *the most masculine* form of climbing, to be instead a particularly *feminine*

Left, Dawn Glanc gets her ab workout on Pull the Trigger Tigger (d11, Dry Tool 11), Colorado's San Juan Mountains. Above, Mountain guide and mixed ice climbing champion Glanc, Ouray, Colorado.

pursuit, where precision, delicacy, and grace are tantamount to success. And I got an inkling of how, if you were to learn such skills in a relatively benign environment like Colorado's Ouray Ice Park, you could carry those skills to the high ranges of the world and use them to unlock swift passage up ephemeral threads of ice, rock, and snow, in previously unimaginable ways.

Dawn's irrepressible humor and enthusiasm don't hurt either. Whether discussing her "booty-quake" method for getting psyched for challenging climbs or the satisfaction she finds in helping other women discover their own inner climber, you can't help but want to be more like Dawn, living a life confronting your limitations in spectacularly beautiful places.

Dawn grew up in the Midwest, far from the mountains, and she came to climbing relatively late by modern standards. Dawn is a certified mountain guide, who guides for Chicks with Picks, Chicks Rock, and other companies. She's also a dedicated student of Warrior's Way, a mental training method created by Arno Ilgner, author of the book, *The Rock Warrior's Way*.

As she discusses below, Dawn is a fierce competitor, who won the women's division of the Ouray Ice Festival Competition in 2009 and 2011, took second place in 2007 and 2012, and third place in 2010. In 2012 she won first place in mixed climbing at the Teva Winter Games (later renamed Winter Mountain Games) held in Vail, Colorado.

Outside the competitive arena, Dawn has completed first ascents in Cody, Wyoming, ranging from WI3-4+, and six first ascents in Iceland, ranging from WI5-5+. She's redpointed Gold Line (M10) at Poser's Lounge in Ouray, and in

2008 she was a member of the Big Expedition for Cancer Research, an expedition sponsored by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center of Seattle, Washington, to scale an unclimbed, unnamed peak in Alaska's Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve. Outside the United States and Iceland, Dawn has climbed in Canada, France, Norway, Greece, Montenegro, and Croatia. She's sponsored by Mountain Hardwear, La Sportiva, Black Diamond, BlueWater Ropes, and Julbo. And she's so naturally funny, that if the climbing gig doesn't work out, she may have a second career as a stand-up comedian.

ROOTS

My name's Dawn Glanc. I was born in 1975 in Brunswick, Ohio. Growing up, I was a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde kid. In school I was a genius. I got straight As. I got my homework done early. Teachers loved me.

But as soon as I left school, I was the worst kid in the world. My sister (three years younger) was my partner in crime. I'd get these crazy ideas like, "Hey, let's go to the mall and shoplift!" and "Let's go to this party and do this just awful thing." I won't even admit the things we did. I think we were really seeking a sense of adventure, that sense of pushing it, but in a negative way. In climbing you have a similar excitement. Are we going to get away with this? And when you do, it feels good.

But I grew up in a suburb of Cleveland. I had no outdoor outlet. What was I to do? The only sport I had was softball. *Give me a break!* Softball is *not* an outlet! So I'm superhappy that I found climbing. Honestly, I don't know what would have happened to me otherwise.

After high school, I attended Kent State University for three years, and that's when I began climbing. When I was twenty-one, I moved to the Black Hills of South Dakota to attend Black Hills State University. In 2004 I moved again, this time to Bellingham, Washington, in order to pursue a career as a professional mountain guide. Now I live in Ouray, Colorado, when I'm not traveling the world to climb.

At Kent State I was dating a guy, and believe it or not, he invited *my roommate* to go climbing with him. I was livid! I couldn't believe this guy would do such a thing, because I *really* wanted to try climbing. So to calm me down, he took me to this tiny place called Whipp's Ledges in Hinckley, Ohio. For the first year my entire climbing experience was top-roping thirty-foot cliffs. It wasn't until I moved to the Black Hills that I really learned to rock climb.

The first time I went sport climbing in South Dakota I said to my partner, "How do we get around to the top?" And he said, "We don't. We have to lead it." And I didn't have any idea what that meant. Then that winter the same friend called me and asked if I wanted to go ice climbing and I said, "Yeah, I think so" [laughs].

Honest to God, I had no idea what he was asking me to do. But I thought, "Hey, it's climbing," so I figured I would love it. And sure enough I did. I loved it from the very first moment.

I like all kinds of climbing. I really love rock climbing, but I think my true passion is ice and mixed. There's something that comes over me when I get those tools in my hands. I feel like I can climb anything!

I believe that I excel most in ice and mixed, because I have complete confidence that I can

hang on to the tools, no matter what. With rock climbing I'm not so sure. I'm never sure I can hang on to that *crimper*, and I'm more scared rock climbing because of that uncertainty.

But when I have ice axes in my hands, I know I can hang on to those tools for as long as it takes. If I can get them set in the ice or rock, I'm good to go. That gives me confidence to push through routes and grades I never imagined I could.

MIXED CLIMBING

When it comes to accessibility and the sheer number of routes at different grades, Ouray is the greatest place in the United States to live for ice and mixed climbing. And the beauty of the Ouray Ice Park is that you can top-rope all sorts of routes when you're first learning. I definitely did my fair share of that, but, as I like to do with lots of things, I also threw myself into the fire. You only get better at your weaknesses if you work on them. And mixed climbing was my weakness. I knew that if I moved to Ouray, then I would compete in the annual Ice Festival competition and that would require mixed climbing.

But I didn't know how! It was humbling, because I felt like I could climb any kind of ice, but when it came to mixed, I was starting all over again. But confidence in the tools came quickly to me. I was able to push all my mental fears aside as soon as I grabbed hold of the ice tools.

So I'm superpsyched that I can hang on to these awesome handles, but sometimes the pick of the ax wobbles and teeters on the rock. When that happens you have to move with complete stillness in mixed climbing, and that's why it is so intriguing to me.



*Dawn Glanc picks
her way up Flying
Circus (M8+,
i.e. mixed 8+),
Colorado's Ouray
Ice Park.*

It's crazy, but when you put your tool on a placement, you cannot make any unnecessary movements, because if you do that, then the tool's going to pop. Most of the time the tools are only sitting on the very tip of the pick. I always joke that if you blink—you're outta there. Suddenly it's just *poof*, and you're falling.

That's a big difference from rock climbing. On rock I can feel my hands slipping. I feel my toes slipping. I don't feel that when I have metal connecting my hands and feet to the rock. I don't have the same sensory connection. But at the same time, I can stand on things that are completely different. I can pivot and do things with my body that I can't do when my rock shoe is smearing. So when I'm mixed climbing, I feel perhaps a different freedom of movement and a little more gymnastic quality to what I'm doing.

Many people think that lack of connection is much scarier. Wobbling tools and the sound of crampon points screeching over rock scare most people. The sounds of mixed climbing freak people out. But to me, that's just part of the chaos of the sport. The fun is to accept the chaos and the craziness and still be able to focus and make it all happen.

ENJOYING THE SPORT

I love anything that has to do with climbing. I have a very addictive personality; I'm very compulsive. I do the same things over and over. Climbing provides this 100 percent laser focus where nothing else matters. I can't get that from anything else, and I need it. My personality is the type that if I don't climb on a regular basis—either daily or a few days a week—I go crazy. Literally. I can't go without it. I've gotten so used

to having climbing be a major part of my life I can't give it up; there's nothing else that would fill the void. Sure, I could try skiing. I could try all these other things, but my brain would be all over the place.

Then there's the social bonds. There's no way I would give up the time I spend with my climbing partners. You know how modern life is. You go out to dinner with your friends and everyone's on their stupid phones, they're texting, everyone's busy and distracted.

But when you go climbing together, that's your time, and you're 100 percent there for your partner. I'm beginning to realize that kind of connection is rare in today's world. So I value it more.

The thing I like *least* about climbing is hiking uphill with a heavy pack. I love to work hard. I love to push myself, but humping heavy loads is grunt work. So when I'm approaching a peak in order to climb it, having a heavy pack is not my favorite thing.

COMPETITION

I've been doing the Ouray ice climbing competition since 2007. I've competed at Ouray six times, and I've been in eight comps overall. I hold the Ouray comp in high regard. The best climbers in the world come here to compete, and I wanted to see if I was as good. Could I beat them? Could I even compete or was I just going to be laughed off the stage? I was lucky each year I competed. I did well. I made the podium not just first, but second and third as well. In 2012 I gave a slide show about my journey as an ice climber during the festival, and during the show, I mentioned I felt even more honored

to be giving a slide show than to be competing, because presenting means you have made it, you're recognized by your peers.

Then in 2011 mixed climbing was added to the Teva Winter Games in Vail, and I was invited to compete. And Bozeman, Montana, held an Ice Fest in 2013 in which I competed. I'm hoping that all the time and energy I've put into competitive climbing will help me make the Olympic team in 2014. The International Olympic Committee will hold a World Cup-style, mixed-climbing event as an exhibition. It's just an exhibition, but I don't care. I'd be honored to represent America.

GUIDING

I feel lucky I get to work as a climbing guide. Taking people into the mountains to rock climb, ice climb, travel on glaciers, and so forth is really fun. I enjoy sharing with the students the crazy learning curve they experience, which, *luckily*, is something I don't remember very well from my own early years [laughs].

It's cool, because if you can get students when they're still fresh, before they develop bad habits, and before they say something like, "Oh my friend told me to do it this way," you can help them avoid having to relearn the skills

So that's the cool part. Watching people excel. And later I'll be in the ice park, or out in the mountains, and I'll run into a former student and realize, "Hey, I had you in a course." And they're out there on their own, and I'm proud I was an important part of that process.

When it comes to ice climbing, everyone is scared of the same things. It doesn't matter whether you're a man or a woman. We're all scared of freezing to death. We're all scared of

heights and falling, of a tool popping and hitting you in the face, or of ice falling on your head.

Working with other women is cool, because we naturally have a better bond. Female students feel freer to ask female guides lots of questions. They usually say, "I've got a hundred stupid questions for you." But they're *not* stupid questions. They are just the same questions everybody wonders about.

If you can empower women, it has amazing results. Let's face it: Most of the time women are the head of their household. They make everything run. Sorry men! You may not want to admit this, but it's usually the case. And if you give a woman the sense that she can do anything, it's amazing what she will take home and do with that knowledge.

Women who complete ice-climbing courses achieve a newfound sense of accomplishment. They think, "Hey, I didn't freeze to death! I didn't die when I fell. I was able to tie knots and belay my partner safely." Newly trained female climbers walk tall. Their attitude becomes, "Bring it on! I can do better. I can manage every aspect of my life better."

Many of the women we teach through Chicks with Picks were not athletic growing up. We've had women in their fifties and early sixties as students. We have even had seventy-year-olds. These people had no sports opportunities as kids. Climbing class is their first athletic experience, and they realize that they have the ability to dig deep and the mental toughness to push through fear. Most of them didn't know they had that in them. You show them that they can push beyond their comfort zone, and it's absolutely amazing the change that occurs.

CHROMOSOMES

I think women definitely approach climbing differently than men. Our body types are different. Our shapes are different. The size of our hands are different, and all these things affect the way we climb. And the mental aspect is different as well. Most women I know (I'm not going to say all women) have a different level of risk that they're willing to take. It's not that they hold themselves back but that they are more calculated. Women think things through. And they have a different sense of caring when it comes

right down to it. You know, when I'm out climbing with Kitty Calhoun, she's tough as nails, but if I'm having a bad day, then she's going to give me a little *more love* than if I'm out with some dude. So there's compassion and a sense of sisterhood that women climbers celebrate together and that brings a whole new element to our climbing experience.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

My biggest strength is my ability to remain calm. I had a climbing accident in France, where I got



Dawn Glanc searches for a way out of Confinement (M8) Ouray Ice Park.

smashed in the face with some ice and the friend who was with me says she's never seen anyone remain so calm through such a traumatic experience. My face was split open. Blood was everywhere. My friend was freaking out, because she can't deal with blood or guts or stuff like that [laughs]. She's seeing my skull right through the wound in my cheek, so she knows things are bad. But I didn't lose my cool.

I've had plenty of partners who are all over the place emotionally. Freaking out, getting pissed off, kicking the rock, and dropping *F bombs*. But I don't. I think my ability to remain calm has helped me through a lot of scary scenarios.

My biggest weakness is the fact that I suffer from migraines. I suffer from headaches a lot, so I feel that if I don't have one at the moment, I better take advantage of the time. When I'm on an expedition, I can do well as long as I take care of myself. But if a headache comes on all of a sudden, *you're* taking care of me. So I try to give my best and my all when I can, because I know my healthy time is limited. I've had headaches my whole life. My entire family has them. It's something you learn to deal with.

LESSONS

The most important lesson I've learned from climbing is goal setting. I know that if I have a goal, I can reach it if I work *really* hard. Another lesson I've learned is how to work with my fear. This was huge, because now I can face things in other parts of my life and realize, "Hey this isn't so bad. It's not life or death. We're good!"

Huge lessons guiding taught me are to look at the simple things in life and to look at what

really matters. This makes you calmer. It gives you a more relaxed way of looking at things, because whatever I'm going through right now is not as bad as some of the spots I've gotten myself into climbing.

The way I deal with the stress is to stay physically healthy. I'm a huge advocate of weight training. If I have a goal I'm working toward, then you're going to find me in the gym putting in overtime. I'm an advocate of going to the weight room three times a week. That helps me, because when I'm there, I can visualize. It's like meditation in action. Yes, I'm trying to push my body and become physically stronger, but at the same time I'm thinking about my goal. If I'm training for a comp, then I'm working out while envisioning myself finishing first. The same goes for working a route. I'm certainly not going to visualize *not* making it to the top. So that's something I get from the weight room. It's been a huge help for me, because in my mind I've already seen that I can do what I need to do.

And when I'm out there climbing a project or competing and things don't go as well as I'd like, I try to learn from the experience. That's the only way to move forward. When I'm performing, I do my best. If I fail, I come home and say, "Well I didn't make it because my heart rate was going through the roof. I let myself freak out. Okay, why did you freak out?" I'm constantly picking this stuff apart, trying to learn and improve.

I used to beat myself up like crazy. I would think, "Why can't I climb this?" I realized I needed to take a hard look at why. Complaining wasn't going to make a difference. Being pissed off wasn't going to make the situation go away!

That's how I've managed everything in my life. "Okay, that didn't work. Why didn't it work? Let's figure this out, then come back and do it better."

CLOSE CALLS

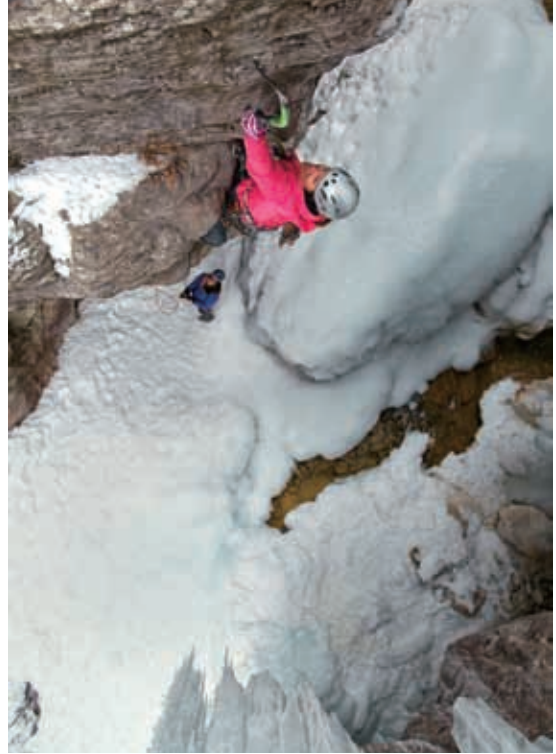
I've been really lucky. I haven't had too many close calls. The accident in France, when I got smashed in the face, was a freak occurrence. There's nothing we could have done differently; nature just knocked a massive chunk of ice down on me. Lots of people laugh at me and say I'm going to win the climbing safety award each year, because I really go out of my way to take those extra steps to make sure we don't have problems.

For example, I don't like to solo without a rope. I almost fell off an ice climb soloing. I almost killed myself. It was one of those *holy shit* moments. So now, if you take my rope away from me, I'm paralyzed. If you give me my rope back, I'm fine.

Another close call was in Ouray Ice Park, where I was climbing a hanging dagger of ice. It was a route that started on ice, continued on rock, then finished on this massive hanging pillar. The pillar was probably fifteen feet around and thirty feet long, dangling in space.

It was a warm day. I shouldn't have been there. I did the rock moves then climbed out onto the pillar and traversed around to the front. I was climbing toward the top, when I looked up at the bridge across the canyon and my husband and one of our friends was there. So I shouted up to them, "Hey how's it going? The ice is soooo good right now!"

Then I swung my tool and *pop!* The entire icicle broke off. I didn't realize what was



Kitty Calhoun belays Dawn Glanc on Bipolar (M9) the Ouray Ice Park.

happening. I heard the pop. I'm still hanging on, but I was falling with it, wondering, "What the hell?" I'm on a giant icicle, and it's falling!

Luckily I had not put any screws in the ice, so when my rope came tight, it sucked me back to the last bolt I'd clipped on the rock, and because I fell so far, the rope sucked my belayer up into the wall as well, way off the ground. If he had still been standing below the climb, he would have been smashed by the falling ice. But nothing happened to either of us. There have been many times I foolishly thought I could climb anything, do anything. I'm glad I got away with that, but since then, I've definitely looked at ice differently.

FEAR

I try to work consciously with fear. I try to think clearly about what is *real* fear and what is *irrational* fear, because irrational fear can be a total showstopper.

I know when the irrational fear is coming, because my heart rate soars. So now I focus on recognizing the physical changes that occur in my body when I get scared. Because things can be going great. I'm not pumped. I'm not tired. But the moment I feel my heart rate begin to increase I feel the whole thing falling apart. Your heart rate is naturally elevated when you're doing something physical. But if it increases past a certain level, then your vision narrows. The world closes in. You can't see the next move, and that's when you blow it.

So I try *really* hard to watch that, whether I'm on rock, ice, or mixed. It doesn't matter. I try to be aware of the tendency and manage it. Luckily for me I can hang on all day! That's been a big help in keeping calm, taking some deep breaths, and remembering, "Okay, I chose to be here."

I feel like a Zen warrior out there, fighting my warrior's battle with myself. Thinking I'm not going to let this fear get the best of me! Warriors don't go into battle thinking they're going to lose, and I don't attempt a climb thinking I'm going to fail. I learned this mental aspect of climbing from Arno Ilgner, the creator of Warrior's Way, a mental training method for climbers. When I'm working with my clients, I see that what I'm really teaching them is confidence, the idea that they are engaged in a battle within themselves that they are choosing to fight.

I'm *choosing* to go up that climb. I'm the one who picks this crazy project, and in order



Dawn Glanc bridges the gap on Bipolar.

to succeed I've got to have a strategy. *Not hope*. Hope is not a strategy. But it's not about conquering the rock, the mountain, or your competitors. What you conquered is the part of yourself that said you couldn't do it. You pushed through your weakness. You grew within yourself. That's what's important.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

My most important climbing accomplishments are those climbs that I completed even though I had doubts. When I chose them, I thought no way. But I planned and trained for each goal,

and I succeeded! They are not necessarily climbs that mean anything to anyone else. They include my first 5.9 trad lead and my first M9 (mixed climbing 9), climbs that are important to me. I would never give those experiences up.

But the most meaningful experiences I've had in the mountains are those I've shared with a great partner. If you have someone on the other end of the rope pushing confidence up to you, *keep him or her*. Do not let that partner go! Say, "Okay fine. You need to have Peet's Coffee in the morning before you go climbing. Great! No worries. We will always have Peet's." The beauty of a great partnership is to discover the quirks in each other, to realize we're all weird, and to understand that we all have things that scare us and that make us goofy. I would never trade for anything the experiences I shared and the bonds I formed through climbing.

CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge I've had to overcome has been being female. *Honestly!* Now that I'm married dudes don't just call and say, "Hey, we're all going to the gym today. Hey, we're all going to the crag. Come along." It just doesn't work that way. So it's been hard to find partners. It's hard to have a sunny day free and not have a climbing partner. I suppose I feel it more since there are so few women ice and mixed climbing. So that's why being a woman has been a challenge for me.

THE FUTURE

I want to climb until I'm *very* old. I don't want to give up my friends or my climbing experiences. I don't want to give up the amazing places I get to see.

I'm reminded of the time I attended my ten-year high school reunion and ran into a former classmate who asked what I was doing for a living. At the time I was running the outdoor program at an air force base. So I said, "I take military personnel outside—bike riding, climbing, hiking, skiing, all these awesome things." Then I said, "What do you do?" And she crinkled up her nose and said, "Well, I hope I'm past the stage of riding my bike."

And I just thought, "Please God, don't let me ever become like her! Don't let me ever grow out of this stage! Let me be outdoors, climbing and biking and enjoying life as long as I can."

RELATIONSHIPS

I have a fantastic husband, Patrick Ormond. We've been married since 2011.

Pat and I met on Alaska's Mount McKinley. I was guiding, and he was on a personal trip. My group got stuck in a snowstorm at eleven thousand feet. I got out of my tent to start shoveling one morning, and there he was, right on the other side of the snow wall. I thought, "Whoa, that guy is kinda cute." Then we kept running into each other, but we were either dating other people or living in different states. This went on for five years. Then a mutual friend came to Ouray and took some photos of me climbing. He went back to Salt Lake City and showed Pat the photos. And Pat said, "Hey, I know that girl." And Jeremiah said, "Well, you should *know* that girl. She's *single*. You should *call* that girl." So Pat called, and after six months, we finally reconnected, and it's been magic ever since.

I was single a long time. I didn't date anyone, because it was impossible. I didn't live anywhere.

How do you psych yourself up for a hard route?

In the morning before going climbing, I'll put on what I call booty-quake music—really loud, hip-hop, dance music, much to the chagrin of my landlord, who lives upstairs. That gets me motivated. And when my partner picks me up and we've got a drive ahead of us, I'll try to keep the booty quake pumping! I climb with Kitty a lot, and if you can believe it, she's not into booty quake, so she's had to learn to deal [laughs]. And so has Pat and everybody else around me, because no one else I know listens to that kind of music.

What's your favorite place to climb?

I love desert crack climbing, and when I went to Yosemite for the first time, I discovered I love granite crack climbing as well. And for

ice climbing, you can't beat Ouray. But if I had to choose a place other than Ouray, then I would choose Iceland because it has the craziest ice I've ever seen. The wind is insane there. It's strong all the time, and as the water freezes, the wind bends it in all these amazing ways. There are horizontal icicles and wind-sculpted caves. So climbing in Iceland is challenging and beautiful at the same time.

If you could offer one essential tip to other climbers, what would it be?

The advice I give to all climbers, regardless of whether they're young or old, is when learning how to climb, spend some time with a certified mountain guide. When you learn from a professional, you learn the correct information the first time, and you learn the

I would rather go climbing than spend my time with a boy. I'm selfish. I'm happy to miss a social event and go climbing instead. Climbing's my thing. So relationships are hard.

But Pat's been a climber his entire life. He started climbing when he was two. He's also a mountain guide. So I feel very lucky, because we both understand that there are going to be times

we're apart to pursue our passion. We've created a committed relationship in which we accept that we're going to spend five to six months apart every year. But entering into a relationship knowing that has been beneficial, because we look at the times we are together in terms of quality, not quantity. We have limited time together, so we make the most of it.

safest, most efficient way to deal with the risks you encounter.

And secondly, there are so many girls and young women out there who don't think it's cool to exercise, because it makes their hair messy or their nails dirty. And I say, "Sisters, if you really think it's cool to just be a bump on a log and never do anything with your life, fine." But the things that set you apart in life are the passions you have. Follow those passions. If you want something out of life, go for it. You're not going to accomplish much sitting on the couch.

How do you train?

I've been lifting weights since I was thirteen. I started because some girls in school were bullying me. After I took care of that problem, I wanted to be thin, but I knew I wasn't

going to starve myself, so I kept lifting. And as I grew older, I wanted to stay young, and I believe exercise is the fountain of youth. I know that if I want to still be climbing when I'm ninety, then I have to keep up with my training. As a climber, I think it's superimportant to weight train in order to balance your body. My program aims to balance my muscles, keep me strong, prevent injuries, and help me with my life in general.

I do train specifically for mixed climbing, but when the comp is over, I don't stop going to the gym. I'm right back in there the following Monday. That consistency is important. It makes me feel amazing. I like feeling that my body is strong. It gives me confidence in all areas of my life, not just climbing.