

Junko Tabei: Conquerer of Mountains

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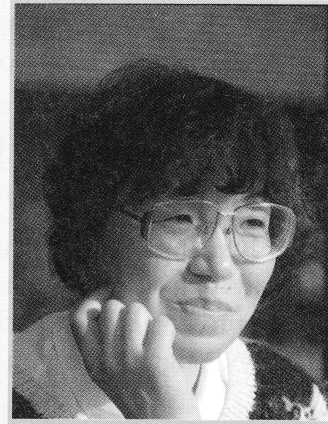
Imagine that you are the leader of a mountain-climbing expedition that will take you to the top of the world—the peak of Mount Everest, 8,850 meters (29,035 feet) high. Thin air, freezing winds, and numbingly cold temperatures stand between you and your goal. You're in your tent in the frigid cold when
5 an avalanche strikes. You are buried under a block of ice. You cannot move. You can barely breathe. What would you wish for in those last moments?

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For Junko Tabei, the first woman to climb Mount Everest, her wish was another chance to see the family she had left behind in Japan. Her thoughts went to her three-year-old daughter. She hoped her little girl would somehow learn to get along without her mother. Tabei then lost consciousness for about six minutes, while her Sherpa guide dug her out.



With no intention of giving up, she continued climbing, despite the injuries she had received in the avalanche. It would take all of the tenacity, strength, and will she could summon to become the first woman to conquer Mount Everest. She remembers the feeling when she reached the summit. When asked if reaching the top was everything she had expected, she said, "There was no enjoyment, just relief. I was very, very happy that I didn't have to climb anymore."

Mount Everest is said to be unforgiving. Temperatures can plunge to well below freezing. The mountain's extremely steep faces, together with its strong winds, thin air, and deep crevasses, make the climb incredibly dangerous. Climbers must be experienced mountaineers in top physical condition. As they reach higher altitudes, they have to stop to let their bodies adjust to the lack of oxygen. In addition, the climbers have to carry heavy equipment with them in their ascent. These hardships have contributed to the challenges all Everest climbers face. Over sixty-nine people have died while trying to achieve their goal. Eleven expeditions had tried and failed to reach the top before Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay, a local Sherpa, did so on May 10, 1953.

Climbing Mount Everest takes two days or more, but months or even years of preparation are required before the climb begins. Money for supplies, transportation to Nepal, Sherpa guides, and climbing fees charged by the Nepalese government must be found. For Tabei, the preparations were almost as daunting as the climb. While seeking funding for her expedition, Tabei approached a large corporation, which told her that it was impossible for a woman to climb Mount Everest and that she ought to go home and take care of her baby! If only they had realized that their response would make her more determined to succeed than ever! She began to teach piano from her home and later received sponsorship from a television network to pay for her trip.

Tabei's expedition included fifteen Japanese women and over fifteen tons of supplies and equipment, including tents, sleeping bags, food, stoves, fuel, clothing, climbing tools, and oxygen. Like climbers before them, they established a series of base camps up the side of the mountain. Climbers worked in groups moving equipment up the mountain from one camp to the next, returning at night to the lower camp for a day of rest at a warmer altitude.

Tabei was thirty-five years old when she climbed Mount Everest. Since then, the diminutive woman (under five feet tall) has become the first female to

50 tower over the highest mountains on six of the world's seven continents,
 including Mt. Blanc in Europe, Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa, Mt. Aconcagua in
 South America, Mt. McKinley in North America, and Vinson Massif in Antarctica.
 Hoping to reach her personal goal of covering all seven continents, she is
 awaiting permission from the Indonesian government to climb Mt. Jaya. After
 55 that, her goal is to climb the highest mountain in each country in the world.
 She expects to reach that ambitious goal around the year 2020.

Tabei became interested in mountaineering at an early age. When she was ten
 years old, she climbed a small mountain while on a class field trip. That
 experience touched her profoundly and motivated her to continue seeking ways
 60 to accomplish her dream of climbing the world's great peaks. She has received
 awards and congratulations from the prime minister of Japan, the king of Nepal,
 and other heads of state. She gives interviews, lectures at universities, and has
 appeared on many television talk shows. She is no longer dependent on
 corporate sponsors, because the income from her lectures and appearances
 65 covers expenses for her cherished expeditions. Tabei has served as a role
 model for her children and other adventurous women as well, and she is quick
 to encourage all those with a love of the world's heights to pursue their dreams
 as she did hers.

3 The chart contains some items the author compares, implicitly (implied) or explicitly (clearly stated), in the article. Analyze the comparisons and complete the chart. Label each comparison I (implicit) or E (explicit).

The author compares	with	Comparison Type
1. the difficulty of the climb		
2. Tabei's short height		
3. raising money by teaching piano lessons		



4 **Vocabulary Check** Match the words on the left with their meanings on the right.

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|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ___ 1. expedition (line 1) | a. fall abruptly, become lower |
| ___ 2. barely (line 6) | b. not anymore, not now |
| ___ 3. tenacity (line 16) | c. money for expenses |
| ___ 4. summon (line 17) | d. just a little, scarcely |
| ___ 5. plunge (line 22) | e. loved, valued |
| ___ 6. crevasses (line 24) | f. determination to succeed |
| ___ 7. daunting (line 36) | g. small in size or stature |
| ___ 8. funding (line 36) | h. call up, gather together |
| ___ 9. diminutive (line 49) | i. narrow cracks, openings |
| ___ 10. cherished (line 65) | j. exploratory trip, travel |
| | k. challenging |