

## Winds of Change

I look at change as occurring in two different ways. One way is change that happens in our environment that forces us to change in response to it. The change is usually not planned for and it blind-sides the person caught in it. Another way that change occurs is by choosing to make changes in ourselves. Change happens this way by placing ourselves in situations and choosing experiences that will enable us to discover more aspects of ourselves and allow us to grow personally. It is called "taking risks".

I purposefully place myself in situations that will allow me to grow. I know that if I do this I am able to manage and direct my own changes. Choosing to change internally lets me direct my own personal growth.

I also recognize those situations that present themselves for me to grow are opportunities that may not come again. I must be conscious in order to recognize them and take full advantage of them. Of course, OPPORTUNITIES are never convenient, always involve risk, and always involve growth and change.

In December of 1997, I took advantage of an opportunity to fulfill a goal to climb to the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa. The trip presented itself in September. It was not a convenient time to go time-wise or money-wise. I did many outcome specifications and much programming. I left for Kenya on December 15th. Adventure is too mild of a word to describe my experiences.

Nairobi: The Terminal Hotel had no hot water upon my arrival. In the US, we would consider this type of hotel below rating, way below rating. Forget applying makeup, no light at the mirror.

Mt. Meru. 3 days. 15,000 ft. We did not summit because of storms. We climbed to 13,000 ft. I had never hiked or climbed before. By the time we returned, I could hardly walk, my legs were so stiff (mostly from the descent). Guides carried guns to shoot poachers. Food ok. Latrines unusable to me. No electricity.

Mt. Kilimanjaro: 5 days. 19,000+ ft. Day one: hiking through the jungle in ankle to knee deep mud. Mosquitos always a threat. Pouring rain. Arrived at camp around 5pm soaking wet, covered with mud. My porter had not arrived with my bag. Didn't matter, everything thing in it was wet. Still raining, temperature about 45 degrees F. I was exhausted and chilled. Food terrible.

Day two: Pouring rain, 35-40 degrees F. Didn't take warm clothes for the trek. By mid-afternoon I was shivering uncontrollably. Met up with Jonathan who was stowed away in a cave hoping for the rain to subside. He gave me his jacket. Got to camp. No food, no hot water, no tents. Wind gusts.

Day three: Mist. Still cold (it is not going to get warmer as we climb higher). Got separated from my group, almost went to the wrong camp. More rain. Got to camp Christmas eve. No tent, no duffel bag. My porter went to the wrong camp. I haven't been dry or warm for three days.

Day four, Christmas day: Steep climb on rocks. More mist and rain. Near the camp, sky clears, Sun is hot, short on water, high winds. Terrain; volcanic shale. Food not edible. I'm living for the most part on Snickers and Tiger Milk bars.

We go to bed at 4pm and get up at 1am for the ascent to the summit.

Day 5: Ascent. In the dark, in a blizzard, wind gusts 40-60mph. Straight up rocks, then volcanic ash. Summit by 9am. wind 60mph. temperature 0 to -10 degrees F. I am now completely exhausted physically and emotionally. However, I knew that I would never be the same. Climbing almost straight up in volcanic ash, I finally got the message: SURRENDER to things I cannot change, everything is perfect the way it is, whatever happens, it just doesn't matter and MY LIFE IS NOT HARD.

I am clear on the fact that what I held as important was not very important after all. All of the superficial things we chase after to finally catch them and realize they are empty goals. The things in my life now that are most important are those things that bring me the greatest joy and the greatest pain, those things that we have to work on every day -- our physical health, our emotional growth and self-awareness and our relationships with others. Without attention to these simple things, we are doomed to a lesser quality of life.