



BUZZKILL

How far is too far? What's important in life? Adventurer
SQUASH FALCONER summits Everest in the quest for answers.

What would it feel like if you thought you weren't coming back, if you weren't sure you could make it and that this time you'd pushed it too far? We can try and imagine how that would feel but it wasn't until I was in that very situation, thinking those very thoughts that I found my answers.

Two years ago I climbed Mount Everest. I took my paraglider with me and planned to become the first woman in the world to fly from the top of the world's highest mountain. Sadly, bad weather put paid to that idea and instead my focus shifted to simply reaching the summit.

Getting to the top of a mountain is only half way there. Whenever I climb I'm pushing myself to the limit so it is vital that I constantly ask myself - can I get back down from here? It's not easy to know where your parameters are when you're pushing yourself harder than you have before and you have no benchmark, no real comparison.

The weather forecast had been good but as we pushed through the night towards the summit the clouds rolled in, the wind picked up and the visibility became extremely poor. Many climbers had already started to descend and I kept asking myself, 'can I make it back down from here?' The answer was still 'yes' and so I continued but after a little longer, the weather deteriorated further and I began to think that it was time to head down. I called out to Jangbu, my friend and climbing Sherpa. I signalled that I wanted to turn back but he shouted 'No!

It's just 30 metres to the summit'.

Standing on the top of the world was incredible at the time but it is more wonderful now that I'm safely back down and writing about it! We spent a very short time on the summit, there was no view and we knew we had to get moving as time would soon be against us if we didn't. Within a couple of hours we came across a guy who was clearly in trouble and barely conscious. His Sherpa's shouted to us that we should continue down the mountain and that a rescue team were on their way up.

There was little I could do but it went against every natural instinct in me carry on and leave him there...I wanted to help in some way. With another climber we tried to administer a shot of Dex (a steroid that sometimes can help someone in real trouble) but it was impossible. As I carried on down towards the camp I was cold, freezing cold. I was stumbling and exhausted and I honestly I wasn't sure if I could make it.

It was then that my mind-set shifted...I had very few thoughts but I could hear my mum's voice in my head telling me that I was strong and that I could carry on. I felt nothing but love, the love that I had for everyone who I wanted to get home to and also the love they had for me. When everything was stripped back and my mortality stared me in the face, that was all there was and in that instant I realised that for me, that was it; the most important thing in life is love. That was a pretty epic moment!

