

## **Carolyn Randall and Vince Bousseilaire Deaths on Matterhorn By Steve Martin**

August 12, 2008

All,

By now, you have probably become aware of the tragedy on the Matterhorn that resulted in Carolyn's death. Kevin, Brian, and I got home last night, and I put together a brief piece for the climbing community that I'm attaching to this FYI.

The service for Vince Bousseilaire will be at 6:30 PM Thursday. Kevin and I expect to go to Golden to meet with Connie Bousseilaire, Vince's wife, sometime this week so she will have answers to any questions that might remain after my phone call to her from Zermatt.

I've had long phone conversations with Carolyn's husband and with her son Ben, and expect to see her husband Harold in Fort Collins within the next week. I'll let you know if there will be any memorial gathering here for Carolyn.

This is such a tragic loss, and those of us who were involved and who have cared so deeply for Carolyn are numb.

Steve

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I've just returned from Zermatt and have the terrible task of reporting to you the tragic deaths of Carolyn Randall (a long-time 14erWorlder and my very close friend and key climbing partner of many years) and Vince Bousseilaire (a marvelous man known by many of you--you are already aware of his death from the local media and from Bob Dawson's forum thread). I've spent the past few days dealing with the helicopter rescue crew, the police, the Embassy people, and talking with Carolyn's and Vince's family members. So writing this might bring some very preliminary closure, I hope.

Right to the moment of the tragedy, the trip had been remarkably successful and marvelous. Six of us (Carolyn, Vince, Kevin Willey, Brian Stefanovic, Larry Panzarella, and I) went first to Chamonix and

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had a great climb of Mont Blanc following the Three Monts Route from the Cosmiques Hut to the top, and descending by the Gouter Dome Route to the Tete Rouse Hut where we spent our summit-day night before making the final descent to the valley the next morning. The clear weather on Mont Blanc and the superb Three Monts Route made for a wonderful experience for all of us, especially for Carolyn, because I had asked her to lead the first rope for the entire ascent, and she loved the challenges of the three bergshrunds and the several large crevasses we encountered. On Mont Blanc and later on the Matterhorn, she was climbing at her peak, showing confidence, strength, stamina, and great climbing technique.

We took the train from Chamonix to Zermatt on August 5th and the next day sorted gear for the climb. Because I had hurt my right foot on the descent from Mont Blanc, we rearranged our climbing rope teams for the Matterhorn climb and went through a revision of our climbing plans to incorporate a rope of two (Brian and Larry) and a rope of three (Carolyn, Kevin, Vince). Later on the 6th we made the easy hike up to the Hornli Hut, where Gary Hellenga and Bill Blazek joined us for conversation and sharing of plans for summit day.

The team left the hut a bit before 4:30 AM (one is not allowed out of the hut until the guides with their clients have departed). Weather conditions were perfect and as dawn came the sky was cloudless. It remained so to the time our two teams made the summit in 6 1/2 hours. All were climbing strongly. The last persons to talk with them were Gary and Bill, who had summited and had started down shortly before. About 11 AM light, wispy clouds began swirling around the summit. Vince threw his small bible into the air at the summit for it to fall into its resting place, as we have watched him do on other high summits, and the rope teams started down. Carolyn was pure joy. She'd made a remarkably strong ascent and was incredibly happy. We have a photo of her excitement on the summit of Matterhorn.

Brian and Larry, having only two on their rope, proceeded faster and made it to the highest group of fixed ropes in good time, while visibility was still good. The weather, which had been picture perfect, changed exceedingly rapidly into a raging electrical storm with numerous lightening strikes all around (some within 100 feet of the

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second rope), and strong winds developed. Static filled the air, raising hair straight up and creating buzzing everywhere until the next lightning discharge came; within 30 seconds the static would rebuild. The rapidity of this development was remarkable, and those of us viewing the mountain at that time from the Hornli Hut were incredulous. Up there, where Vince and Kevin and Carolyn were, the clouds quickly obscured the route and visibility was extremely low. They were in a serious, serious alpine storm.

The second rope team descended as quickly as they could, making several raps along the main route. Eventually, in the cloud fog, they got slightly off-route, but recovered. This happened a couple of times, and route finding was very difficult under the restricted visibility conditions. Speed with safety was the issue, in order to get below the electrical storm. And they were climbing on wet rock and rappelling with crampons. It became apparent that coiling the rope between rappel stations and then uncoiling at the next station took far too much time, so the protocol adopted was for Carolyn to tie one end of the rope to her harness and let the rope dangle out behind her as she moved on toward the next feasible rappel point. As they approached the next rap station Kevin would draw up the other end and thread it through the eyebolt and they'd be on rappel in a hurry. This worked well and markedly shortened the time.

They came to yet another snowfield that had to be crossed to get to the next rappel station that was periodically visible as the clouds swirled. The snow surface was soft, allowing Carolyn to kick a nice platform 3-4 inches deep with every step. They were on an approximately 45-degree slope and were traversing across it slowly and carefully, with the dangling rope stretched out behind Carolyn and looping a ways down the snowfield. They proceeded until the rap station was about 100 feet away. Kevin, in the second position, enlarged Carolyn's step platforms on every step forward.

Of course Kevin and Carolyn were focused on their every step, so they were unaware of Vince's slip until they heard him scrape in the snow. Vince failed to self-arrest, and his speed built rapidly. Both screamed to Vince to self-arrest. Kevin saw Vince hit the looping rope and become entangled in it. Vince was then out of sight in the fog, and

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when the rope suddenly went taut against Carolyn and jerked her from her stance she had no idea that the thrust would be coming since Vince had not been tied in to the rope. Kevin said that she instantly went into a very effective self-arrest, putting every bit of her power and will into it, but by then Vince was in free-fall over the edge and his speed and weight pulled Carolyn after him.

The helicopter photos of the fall location indicate that early in his fall the rope must have become free from Vince. It wrapped around a horn, and stopped Carolyn's fall but she had already hit the ledge below and in all probability she died instantly. Vince's body was recovered about 1,000 feet below the fall location. Terrible tragedy. Lives of two splendid people snuffed out.

This left Kevin without a rope and a huge distance on wet, icy rock and tough snow and ice between the fall location and the Salvay emergency hut. Most of that section of the Hornli Ridge is traditionally rappelled (or with guides, the clients are lowered and lowered). For Kevin, every step was a life/death issue. It took him 5 hours to descend to the emergency hut, where Brian and Larry were waiting along with 4 Portuguese climbers. They had left a two rope rappel set up at the top of the Upper Moseley Slab just above the hut for the three climbers still above them. But Brian and Larry had seen what they believed to be a climber falling/tumbling down the face to the east of the hut. The climbers from Portugal had a working cell phone and made a call to the emergency number and a chopper came up for a cursory look just before dark. When they saw Kevin on the ridge it was reported to me that they felt that everyone was accounted for, and they returned to Zermatt. Meanwhile, I provided the hut manager (who also is a key member of the rescue team) the names of our five people, and he kept me well informed on overall progress. The next morning another phone call revealed that Kevin, Brian, and Larry were in the hut with the Portuguese climbers, but nothing was known about Carolyn or Vince. It had snowed much of the night, and everything was iced in. The plan was to evacuate the climbers from the emergency hut by helicopter when weather conditions allowed, but that didn't occur until almost 6 PM on August 8th, the day after the fall. I was also informed that the chopper pilot had located Carolyn's body. Once our climbers were down safely to the Hornli Hut, the pilot

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talked with Kevin to get more detail, and shortly thereafter the helicopter team found Vince's body, far, far below. Both bodies were recovered that evening and taken by helicopter to Zermatt.

We hiked down early the next morning and I began the painful duty of notifying families and coordinating with the American Embassy and police. Kevin was interviewed by the police for almost 3 hours as to details, and a formal report was prepared. We also needed to make positive identification of Carolyn's body for the police.

The above is perhaps more detail than some of you might have wished for, but it describes what happened--and how quickly joy turned to fatal outcomes.

I will forever miss my climbing partner of years. We've climbed hundreds of mountains together, and we had so very, very many plans for the future. And I will miss Vince, that wonderful person who always laid out such a joyous, optimistic view of life and of the current situation.

August 7, 2008. Carolyn reached the summit of the Matterhorn on her 57th birthday, her last day of life.