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The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains

By Barry Blanchard



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With heart-pounding descriptions of avalanches and treacherous ascents, Barry Blanchard chronicles his transformation from a poor Metis (half-breed) kid from the wrong side of the tracks to one of the most respected alpinists in the world. He describes early climbs attempted with nothing to guide him but written trail descriptions and the cajones of youth. He slowly acquires the skills, equipment and partners necessary to tackle more and more difficult climbs, farther and farther afield: throughout the Canadian Rockies, into Alaska and the French Alps and on to Everest, Peru, and the challenging mountains in Pakistan. From each he learns lessons that only nature and extreme endeavor can teach. This is the story of the culture of climbing in the days of punk rock and rock 'n' roll, accompanied by the rhythm of adrenaline and the arrogance of youth. It is a portrait of the power of the mountains to lift us – physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually – and the depths of relationships based on total trust in the person at the other end of a rope. Includes climbs with renowned alpinists such as Kevin Doyle, Mark Twight, David Cheesmond and Ward Robinson. 432 pages with photos and a playlist.



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Editorial Review

Review

Shortlist for The Boardman-Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature, 2015

Finalist, Banff Mountain Book and Film Festival, Adventure Memoir, 2014

"*The Calling* is sure to make any reader with a shred of adventurous inclination wish to have climbed with Mr. Blanchard during the storm years of his strength. Once upon a time, the classics of the genre impelled Barry Blanchard into the alpine game. It is as inevitable as one of his cherished mountain sunrises that some young men and women will glean the same inspiration from *The Calling*." -- *Wall Street Journal*

"A legacy of technical and literary pioneers in alpine climbing in this extraordinarily well-written mountaineering memoir." — *Foreword Magazine*

"Certainly not disappointed by the tales of climbing, I was also deeply impressed by the bravery, quality, tenderness, and vulnerability of Blanchard's writing." — *Elevationoutdoors.com*

"What makes *The Calling* powerful is the fact that Blanchard does not varnish the story of where his chosen path takes him. As a result, the narrative is at times heartbreaking. The closeness that Blanchard discovers with certain climbing partners becomes painfully obvious as they are killed in accidents." — *Adventure Sports Journal*

"I laughed. I cried. I thought about life. I couldn't put down [this] long-awaited memoir." — *Rocky Mountain Outlook*

"A memoir that reads like a conversation over beers around the campfire, deep into the night. It offers the reader intimacy, captivating stories, and a unique chance to get to know the man described as Canada's best alpinist. Blanchard is a solid writer, and while he is already known for his poetic, descriptive prose, it shines in his first, full-length book." — *thecampsiteblog.com*

"Blanchard the master-storyteller writes as Blanchard the young alpinist climbed: passionately, full of heart. These stories are raw and superbly entertaining. Blanchard chronicles the "I hurt, therefore I am" era of mountain climbing." — Steve House, alpinist, author, *Training for the New Alpinism* and *Beyond the Mountain*

"Blanchard describes the essence of an era when climbing was dangerous and sex was safe. Like listening to classic rock music, Barry's writing is just something I couldn't stop reading; it makes me feel good. Keep rockin'." — Marko Prezelj, alpinist, photographer

"Blanchard is a great storyteller, and through his vivid characters and dramatic adventures he takes us on a journey through his early climbs in the Canadian Rockies to his later alpine-style ascents in the Himalaya. It's a compelling book – I couldn't put it down." – Steve Swenson, alpinist

"Blanchard's story of how, after growing up in a broken family on the prairies, he found his purpose and meaning in the mountains. Told through raw dialogue and striking images, what shines throughout is the

respect and love Barry bears for his climbing partners. For Barry, sharing a rope on a mountain is emblematic of a deeply lived friendship." – Raphael Slawinski, alpinist

"Conservative librarians are going to hate this book. The rest of us will love it. Sex (first time), drugs, (oxygen deprivation and others) and rock and roll (OK, more punk than pure rock, but definitely full volume), all against a backdrop of hard climbing on the world's wildest peaks. This is a story of brothers putting it all out there together, to a soundtrack of full-bore punk, sex and wild mountains." – Will Gadd, climber, host of documentary series *Fearless Planet*

About the Author

Barry Blanchard is one of North America's top alpinists, noted for pushing the standards of highly technical, high-risk alpine climbing in the Canadian Rockies and the Himalayas. Blanchard is a Patagonia Ambassador. He lives in Calgary, Alberta.

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Chapter 1 The Rupal

(excerpt)

I saw the avalanche coming. It charged over the step of dirty brown ice above us like a breaking wave of black water, then it was airborne until it hammered back down into the gulley, driving into us like the fist of god. I screamed. The avalanche slapped my crampons out from under me, and I was folded in half. I believed I was going to die. The animal in me fought to force my hand into the torrent, to grab something solid. My crampons raked over the ice as I stumbled, thrusting my knees into the pressure of the onslaught, trying to get my feet under me. I shouted and I thrashed and the surging snow pushed my arms down at the same time that it swept my feet out to flap like rope anchored logs in a strong current. My anchor leash was as tight as cable; it hummed with the resonance of a standing wave and that frequency was transmitted into my bowels along the waist-belt of my harness. My senses where overcome, I didn't know which way was up. I was terrified. The avalanche surged onto any surface that opposed it and I felt the power and the weight of it. It felt like hundreds of tons of sand pouring through the hourglass of the mountain, piling onto us, burying us. Desperate and profane objections were torn from my lips, then muffled and swept off down the mountain. I thought that I would never see my wife again. I knew that I could lose love and life here. I started to plead, to pray, "No. Please, no."

The avalanche, and the weight of it, began to pulsate. My right hand found my locking carabiner. My fingers wrapped into it and the muscles of my hand bulged into a firm hard fist. My left crampon scratched into the ice. I slammed its metal spikes in four times and forced myself upright into the flow. I sensed Ward to my left, had felt the knocking of his body against me and heard the rip of his screams like the tearing of air from an open window when trains pass. I looked up and saw the hazy warmth of his yellow jacket like the flash of a fast moving hull from deep underwater. There was no air. Because I'd leveled my face to the avalanche's flow, an ice cold seal of moving snow pressed over my face until I panicked and thrust my head down to create a channel in which to breath.

The avalanche continued, for minutes, and the rushing snow drummed like a waterfall onto the taut fabric of my hood, stretched tight over my helmet. There were surges and with each surge I quivered and prayed that there would be no chunks of solidly bonded snow. I knew the impact of any firm mass would snap the single 9/16-inch loop of webbing that the three of us were anchored to. I did not want to die. I wanted my life.

Ward was still beside me, and left of him I assumed, and prayed, was Kevin. Marc had been on rappel, last man down, when the avalanche hit. I did not know about Marc. "Please, please let Marc be alive, please."

The pressure was so cold. Millions of ice fragments –the snow- poured over my head and neck and back, each one stealing a small measure of my body heat. After fifteen minutes I was trembling from hypothermia. The avalanche continued. At twenty minutes my mind allowed the macabre irony of dying from the cold,

instead of the physical violence of the avalanche, to enter. The avalanche had become an opponent by then, an enemy. I hated it, swore into it, challenged it. "ALRIGHT YOU FUCKER. GIVE US A BREAK YOU FUCK! ENOUGH ALREADY YOU ROTTEN COCKSUCKER!" The raging snow carried my curses into the vortex that it had created: a 35 centimeter long funnel below my down-turned face. I shook violently, my body jack hammering to produce heat. Then the avalanche hissed away down the polished glare of the ice like the retreating edge of an ocean wave over wet sand. Snowfall turbinized around us and the air felt like cold metal on my teeth. The atmosphere quivered and I could hear the tension of the thunderstorm's electrical charge—white noise crackling in my ears. The midday sky was as dark as dusk. I scraped hard-packed snow from the face of the watch that was threaded through my harness. It was 3:47 pm, July 13th, 1988. The avalanche had ended twenty-seven minutes after it had begun.

Ward's face looked old. Deep lines dragged down the corners of his mouth; I had never seen those lines in his face before. His eyes had the improperly focused look of shock, with too much black in his pupils. Streams of snot and compacted snow ran from his nose and snow had been rammed into his collar and hood because he hadn't had the wherewithal to lower his face from the flow, to protect himself. He was sick from the altitude—cerebral edema. The swelling inside his head was killing him.

"I was just going to unclip and get it over with," he said in a flat emotionless tone.

"Where's Marc?" I gasped, my jaw in spasm.

"I'm here." I saw him left of Kevin and I sighed, "Thank God."

Between us Kevin began shaking the snow off like a wet angry dog.

"ALRIGHT, THAT'S ENOUGH OF THIS FUCKING SHIT!" he snarled, looking very much like he intended to slug someone, "We are getting the FUCK OUT OF THIS FUCKED UP PLACE!"

Comically, half-meter high dunce caps of snow had accumulated on our heads and shoulders. Marc reached across and pushed mine off.

"We have to get the hell out of here," he said.

I saw fear, and resolve, in his eyes. The four of us stood anchored to one tubular drive-in ice screw. It was hitched with a purple bar-tacked sling the width of my ring finger, which, if it were loaded with one thousand pounds, would sever. When the four of us had snapped tight to it we must have hit it with over eight hundred pounds. We stood at 25,300 feet on the Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat, the ninth highest mountain in the world, we were 1300 feet below the summit and we had nearly fourteen thousand feet of the face to descend. I twisted in another screw.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Victor Kohlmeier:

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Susan Arnold:

As people who live in often the modest era should be upgrade about what going on or details even

knowledge to make them keep up with the era which is always change and make progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by reading through books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which you should start with. This The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains is our recommendation to cause you to keep up with the world. Why, because this book serves what you want and need in this era.

Lynne Silva:

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Tonette Land:

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