

Peter Shelton is the author most recently of "Climb to Conquer: The Untold Story of World War II's 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops." He wrote this review at the request of Stone Creek publisher John Gattuso.

Author William Kerig is a former competitive freestyler and writer for Skiing Magazine. With "The Edge of Never," he has pulled a neat trick: written a book about his effort to make a movie that, in the end, didn't get made.

It is not, however, a story of failure. Kerig had wanted to do something few filmmakers in the ski world have succeeded in doing: that is, tell a tale of emotional significance and genuine courage, as opposed to the flashy "Kodak courage" exhibited in "ski porn" of the day.

He chose as his subject the death of Canadian big-mountain skier Trevor Peterson and the coming-of-age some years later of Peterson's son, Kye. Kerig gained young Kye's trust, and the reluctant permission of his mother, for a return to Chamonix in the French Alps. There Kye would meet some of the skiers who had pioneered steep-skiing routes with his father, and maybe even ski the pitch, known as the Exit Couloir, that claimed Trevor's life. Kerig formed an alliance with former ABC anchorman Peter Jennings's documentary production company, assembled a film crew, and began shooting.

But when Jennings died, of lung cancer in 2005, the film project was taken out of Kerig's hands and retooled as a very different movie, one that didn't include the Kye Peterson story. (Kerig hopes to finish his original film idea for release sometime in 2009.)

"The Edge of Never" reads like a screenplay. Kerig has a great ear for dialogue and a gift for weaving tension in and out of the plotline. And the plot includes a surprising amount of doubt on the author's part: doubt about his own motivations, doubt about putting skiers in harm's way for a movie, doubt about bringing young Kye to this dangerous junction in the first place.

The result is both confessional and illuminating: an insider's look at a tribe of devoted—some would say fanatical—skiers in the mountains that are their life- (and all too often, their death) blood.