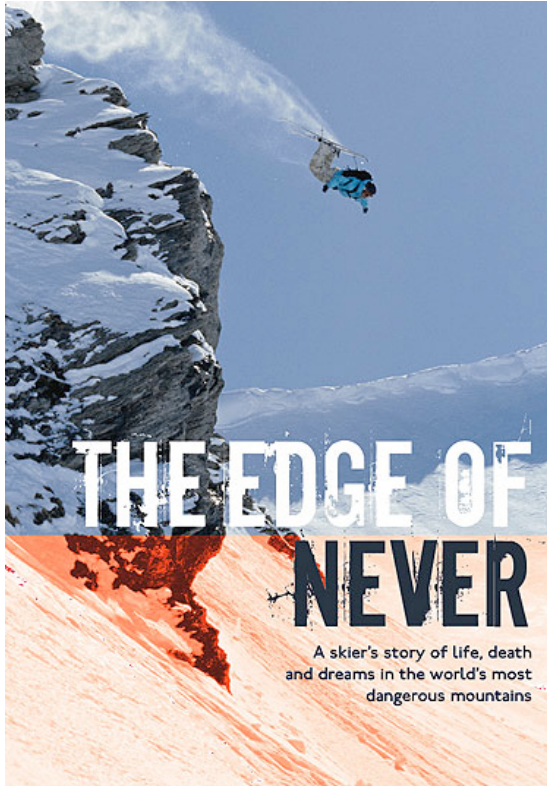


The Edge of Never

A skier's story of life, death and dreams in the world's most dangerous mountains

By William A. Kerig



Bill Kerig made his bones as a skier competing for ten years on the World Pro Mogul Tour. After retiring in 1996, he began building his reputation as a writer and film producer/director, married an understanding woman, and started a family, which led him to mastermind the extraordinary adventure he relates in this remarkable book. Kerig takes us inside the world of big mountain skiing with a group of skiers who arguably invented the sport, with a story within a story within a story. In the center is the legendary Trevor Petersen, who was killed at the height of his prowess in the prime of his life in an avalanche at Chamonix in 1996; that story is encapsulated by the coming of age journey his son Kye makes to Chamonix in 2005 to ski the run where his father died; and surrounding both stories is another equally compelling one about

Bill Kerig's personal quest make a movie that will enable skiers and nonskiers alike "see what it is that makes this mountain life so special that people are willing to die in order to live it. I wanted to see selflessness, the loyalty of family, tradition and respect. I wanted to see men risk their lives to help a boy become a man—a better man than themselves, perhaps."

It is rare for me to read a book start to finish in one day, especially one with the girth of *The Edge of Never*, but that's how it was. Combining astute observation and a penetrating, journalistic style of writing, Kerig puts the reader on that trip to Chamonix with the 110-pound twin-tip riding lost boy who earns his birthright by experiencing his father's last run firsthand—with the able assistance of his dad's good friends Glen Plake and Mike Hatstrup, private instruction from the man who wrote the book on ski mountaineering routes around Chamonix, Anselme Baud, and the unwavering leadership of a chain-smoking French guide called Fanfan, who later nearly dies in a "stupid" fall while filming background shots for the movie.

Kye Petersen was a rising fifteen year old professional skier in 2004 when Bill Kerig proposed that he retrace his father's last run down the Glacier Rond at Chamonix as the premise of a documentary that would seek an answer to why guys like Trevor Petersen would risk life and limb to ski the most treacherous mountains in the world. The very proposition, even though Kye is acknowledged as one of the best fifteen year old skiers in the world, is so crazy Kerig marvels that Tanya Petersen would ever allow her son to do it. Crazy is the word Kye chooses to describe the experience after he does it:

"This is the craziest feeling ever. The satisfaction, the one hundred percent satisfaction from the long mission! I've never done anything that took that long to ski. That much effort. This is really, really cool. And *suuuper* scary. I don't know what kind of words to use, really. The no-fall zones—serious no-fall zones—it's like nothing I've ever done before. Gave me a really crazy feeling of adrenaline. I always wanted to ski this place. To see what my father saw, where he went. Now I've been there. I know now. This is the best feeling, the craziest feeling in the whole world!"

Chamonix is known as "the Death Sport Capital of the World" because an average of sixty people die on its slopes every year. We learn that Anselme Baud's son died just the year before, skiing a route that Anselme had pioneered with Patrick Vallencant almost twenty years before. We meet Doug Coombs on the Aiguille du Midi the day Kye skies the Glacier Rond. A year later, Coombs died in an attempt to save a friend who fell off a cliff while skiing together at La Grave, just down the road from Chamonix. Kerig is inspired to take the risk of doing this project when his mother dies unexpectedly. Then when Peter Jennings, whose company owned the rights to Kerig's movie and was underwriting the film project, dies of lung cancer soon after the crew returns home, the project is sidelined in favor of a documentary about Doug Coombs called "Steep," which came out last year.

Although death plays a prominent role in *The Edge of Never*, the reader gains an understanding of life, and how the men and women who play those stakes do it not because they love death but because they love life and won't let the fear overcome their faith. Kerig writes early in the book, in the chapter called *A Madman's Scheme* about coming up with the concept for the film, a passage that perfectly explains why Trevor would do it, and why Kye (and Bill) would too. "...as a skier I know that taking control requires moving toward the thing you most fear. On very steep terrain, everything in your being screams, *Back off! Get away from the edge!* But you learn to ignore those voices and move toward the emptiness because if you lean away from the void and into the slope, your ski bases tilt and you lose your edge—the only thing holding you to the hill. Lose your edge at the wrong moment, and it could be the last thing you ever do. Control

comes from squaring your shoulders, reaching out and planting your pole down the hill, and moving with complete conviction toward the abyss. It's a thrilling, counterintuitive, high-stakes dance, and it's become my one enduring faith."

Bill Kerig was able to buy the rights to all the film footage described in the book. He expects to release the film he intended to make in Chamonix about Kye and Trevor Peterson in the fall of 2009. It too will be called The Edge of Never. His publisher, John Gattuso of Stone Creek Publications, is sending EpicSki a couple of copies of the book for us to auction. Keep tuned in for details.

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