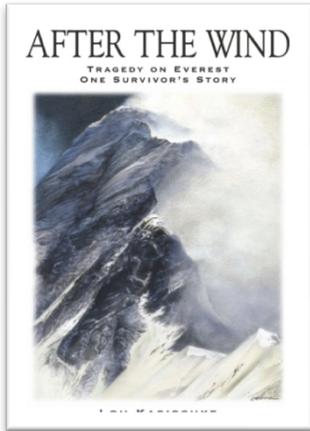


## A CONVERSATION WITH LOU KASISCHKE

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### *Author of AFTER THE WIND: Tragedy on Everest, One Survivor's Story*

\$14 paperback, French flaps and rough edge paper, 9781940877037, 320 pages



#### Awards & Reviews for AFTER THE WIND

**GOLD MEDAL:** Benjamin Franklin Book Award: Nonfiction

**WINNER:** National Indie Excellence Book Award: Adventure/Memoir

**BRONZE MEDAL:** Foreword Reviews' Book of the Year Award

**WINNER:** Shelf Unbound Best Independently Published Book

**“Kasischke's miraculous account of survival is paired with the love story of his connection with his wife Sandy. Intense and profound.” – *Midwest Book Review***

“Eye-opening . . . with evocative illustrations.” – *Publishers Weekly*

“A thoughtful, well-written love story . . .” – *BlueInk Reviews* (starred)

“Vivid and intimate . . . an unforgettable survival story.” – *Kirkus*

(starred)

**“Kasischke's perspective of what happened . . . may shock those who have relied on *Into Thin Air* as the most accurate account.” – *New York Book Festival Award***

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#### *Since you say in the opening pages that most of the book was written in 1997 and 1998, why didn't you publish it then?*

My reasons for writing 17 years ago were different from my reasons for publishing today. I wrote then because the aftermath reporting was like fog rolling in to obscure and distort what actually happened. Too much was written about things that were colorful for storytelling, but did not matter. This led many people to misunderstand the events and reach false conclusions about what went wrong. And so, I wrote things down to solidify and preserve my experience and insight about what happened and why.

But, at that time, I had no interest in publishing. Since the story about what went wrong is about mistakes — human failings — I did not want to be one more voice of criticism about people who were my friends. And who were dead. It just didn't feel right. I was content for 17 years to have my writing reside in a file cabinet.

#### *So then, why did you decide to publish the book now?*

My writing 17 years ago went beyond what went wrong. I also wrote a highly personal (and mostly untold) story about how and why I survived. The tragic story was one I wanted to forget. The personal story was one I wanted to remember. It's about my wife Sandy's role in my survival. A story about the voice of the heart. A love story.

Sandy and I have loved each other 48 years. We have been married 47 years. Today, Sandy is seriously ill. During her illness we have spent many hours reflecting on our lives together. Thinking back to those critical life and death decision moments at noon on 10 May 1996, it was Sandy's love and influence that gave me the inner strength I needed to make the right decision that saved my life.

**AFTER THE WIND** tells the details of that personal story, which can only be told in the context of the bigger historic story. And now is the right time to publish. I do so to honor and to pay tribute to Sandy while we are still together, to share our love story with others, and to thank God for the gift of her love. By publishing, I hope to give a broader and longer life to a story about the voice of the heart as a source of strength.

Climbing Everest, and facing a decision dilemma near the top, is also just the backdrop for an everyday life story— about the human struggle to make hard choices in the face of everyday life pressures. And it's also an example of the role and influence of a personal relationship as a source of inner strength to make the right choices.

#### *What are some of the edits you made to a story written 17 years ago? For instance, what did you feel you needed to take out? And why?*

In late 2013, when I decided to publish my story, I discovered I had written 166,000 words. For normal book length,

*continued*

I needed to cut the number of words in half. My approach was to first cut a 40,000 word “after story,” which covered experiences of some others and myself in the aftermath. Then I cut stories about events on the mountain that I no longer wanted to tell, and some that were not mine to tell. Today, 19 years after the tragic events, it’s clear to me that some stories may (and perhaps should) never be told.

My editing was also about storytelling structure. For instance, I originally wrote too much about other team members. I wanted to respect their privacy and leave the others to tell their own stories, if they chose to. And so, I only told so much about others as was necessary to tell my own story.

I also feared that some stories about the events, and my views, could attract overshadowing attention, and the story I most wanted to tell would be lost. I didn’t want that. I wanted *After The Wind* to be read and remembered for my story — my personal survival experience and my causal analysis of what went wrong. I also cut many details from my analysis of what went wrong. That part of my story dominated in the number of words written. I needed to cut it back to bring it in a better balance with the personal story. I also wrote too much about myself as a climber, about my life outside climbing, and about how all that shaped who I am. And so, for balance, I cut.

***Jon Krakauer, who was part of the same climbing team, wrote the book, Into Thin Air. What was your reaction to it? Did you write your book as a response to it?***

Jon Krakauer wrote the Everest story the way he wanted to write it. I wrote it the way I thought it should be written. *After The Wind* tells the Everest story that *Into Thin Air* doesn’t tell. So, in that sense, each book compliments the other.

My book has a materially different focus, but it is not a response to *Into Thin Air*. If I had wanted to draw attention to our different viewpoints, I would have published it 17 years ago. The two books actually highlight a fascinating issue — how can people in the same situation experience it differently? The difference can’t be in what happened. That was a constant for everyone.

The climbers who lived this story brought “who they are” to the experience of, and their responsive insight about, the events. We are not all alike. I guess that’s what individuality is about. Individuality, and the resulting different experience, occurs because each of us brought something different with us to Everest — different life and career experiences, different expectations, different motivations, different agendas, different influences, different vulnerabilities, different values, different roles in life, different habits, and different personal relationships. All of these affect what we see, think, feel, and do.

Each of us sat in a different seat in the stadium of Everest. Each of us experienced the same events, but from our different view. Each of us took something different away. So, from these differences, each of us has a different story to tell. I acknowledge the difficulty of people who were not there to understand and evaluate the story. What they are told about this tragedy depends upon who is doing the telling. And who you are tells what you tell.

***Why did you choose independent (Indie) publishing over traditional publishing for your book?***

I didn’t need a traditional publisher. Indie is practical, easy, and fast. And because of Sandy’s poor health and my reason for publishing, time was of the essence. I didn’t have the 18 to 24 months it would take to go the traditional route. And frankly, I thought I would have a higher quality outcome going Indie. I feared that, by the time all the editors were finished rewriting, I might not recognize my own story.

I wanted my writing to be me, with all my shortcomings as a writer. I wanted readers to hear my voice — not the voices of a team of editors. I write simply and from the heart. That’s what matters the most.

***Are you planning a follow-up to After The Wind?***

Maybe, but probably not. That will depend upon whether readers first care about *After The Wind*. But I actually have more to say. During editing, I cut a 40,000 word “after story” which covered Everest-related personal growth experiences in the aftermath. I called that time my journey to understand and to be.

**Someone famous once said that the true worth of your journey through life lies not in how far or how high you go, but in whom you come to be along the way.**