

FAST and LIGHT **Chris Lindner**

THE SON OF OBSESSION *by Stephanie Forte*

"Guess what I did last week. I learned to tie a cherry stem in a knot with my tongue," brags 16-year-old Chris Lindner.

"What do you think is more impressive?" I ask, "that or having redpointed a 5.14c?"

Mulling this over for a few seconds he replies, "Well, in the long run the cherry stem may get me farther."

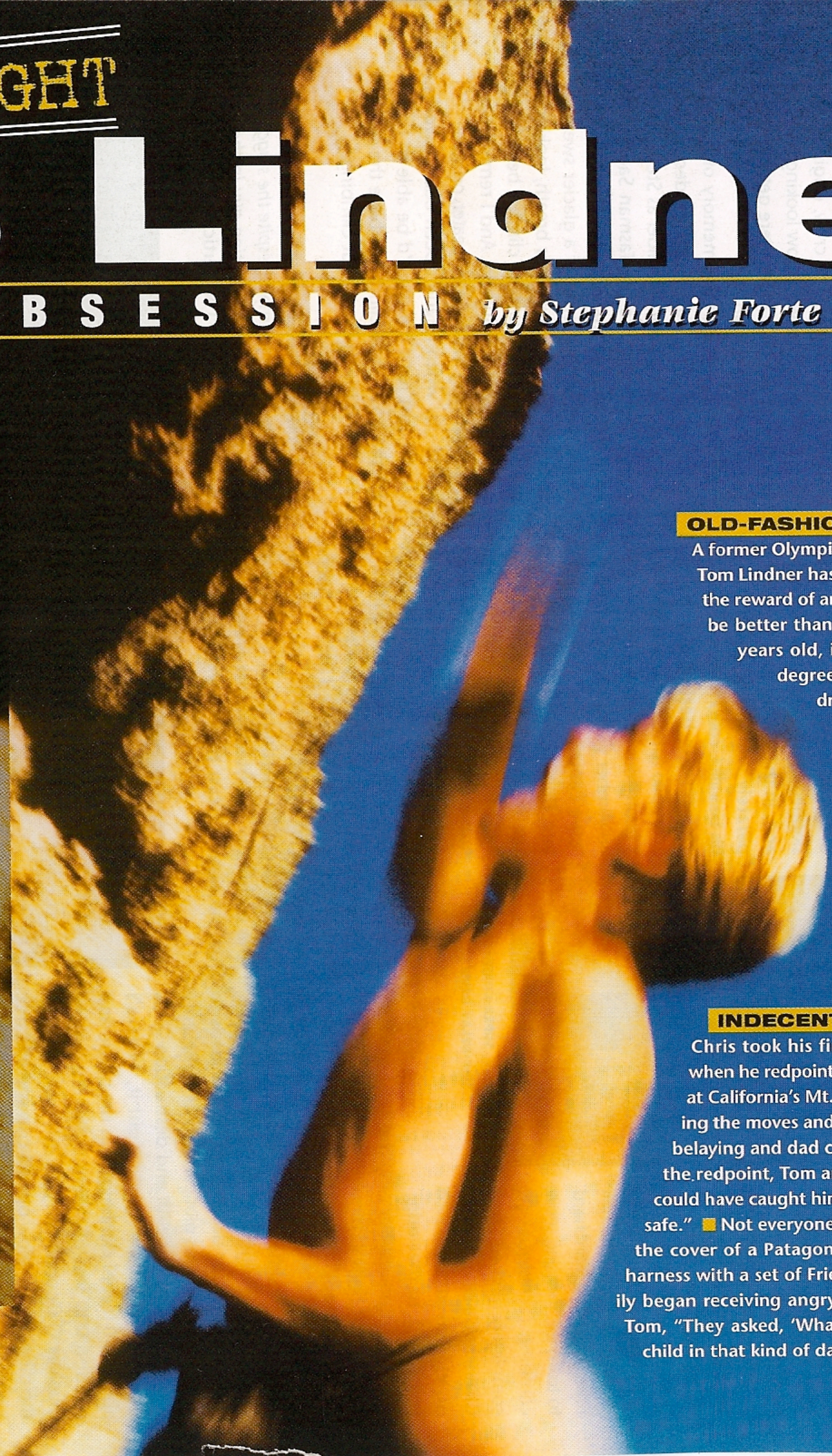
When Chris was born in 1984, Tom and Elke Lindner began molding one of the first families of rock climbing. They had already decided "to do family a little differently." Tom explains: "We didn't want everyone going off in separate directions." Climbing provided a medium for Tom and Elke to teach their son the importance of a sense of accomplishment. But, in a family of overachievers, lessons can be taken to the extreme. Not only has the grand experiment transformed their son into a great, if ambivalent, climber, it has also placed the Lindner's private life under the constant scrutiny of the public eye.

OLD-FASHIONED CLONING

A former Olympic team gymnast and coach, 50-year-old Tom Lindner has redpointed 5.13c and is no stranger to the reward of an athlete's hard work. "I wanted Chris to be better than me," Tom says. His wife, Elke, now 46 years old, is no less accomplished. She earned a degree in engineering while raising three children, working full-time and climbing every weekend. Along the way, she managed to climb 5.13a. In spite of his parents' resumé's, Chris claims he has no special, athletic talent: "I only climb well because I've been climbing for so long."

INDECENT EXPOSURE

Chris took his first step into the limelight at age four, when he redpointed Robbins Crack, a gear-protected 5.10a at California's Mt. Woodson. He spent six months rehearsing the moves and gear placements on top rope, with mom belaying and dad coaching from behind on jumars. During the redpoint, Tom and two friends spotted from below. "We could have caught him from 40 feet," Tom says. "It was totally safe." ■ Not everyone agreed. When the toddler appeared on the cover of a Patagonia catalog — donning a made-to-order harness with a set of Friends that brushed his ankles — the family began receiving angry phone calls from total strangers. Says Tom, "They asked, 'What kind of person are you to put a small child in that kind of danger?'"





FATHER KNOWS BEST

"What people saw between Tom and Chris at the crags was no different than what happens at a Little League game," says Marc Elgort, a climber and longtime family friend. "The big difference is Chris was the only kid out there." But Tom wasn't the type to lurk in the shadows at JCCA comps. Both he and Elke have always had their own climbing agendas — Chris was simply along for the ride. The couple also shares a zero-tolerance policy for slacking off at the crag, often employing an age-old parental tactic: guilt. "Is this what you call endurance training?" Tom demanded one afternoon of Chris, who was lounging at the base of Mt. Charleston, enjoying the social scene. Chris brushed off his father's comment, rolling his eyes, "Tom just thinks I don't know what I want yet." He paused, then smirked, "I guess I don't."

LIFE SUPPORT

Chris has accomplished more in his climbing career than his parents had ever anticipated. In two years, when Chris packs his surfboard and bags for college, will he bring his climbing shoes? As always, Tom has a very strong opinion: "Continuing climbing is like continuing living. You either live or you die."

FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

With the cliffs as their living room, Linder family disputes erupt and are resolved in public. Arguments often revolve around the Lindner Family Golden Rule: Once you begin a climb, you cannot quit. Failure is not in the vocabulary. For Chris, this meant climbing 10 years without a break, climbing when he would rather be playing baseball and climbing while burned out at age 10. "Tom grew up without authority, without a Dad," says the unusually precocious Chris. "Sometimes he just goes overboard." ■ What do the Lindners have to say about families who argue at the cliff? "I think that it's disgusting that people can't leave that stuff at home," Tom says, then turns to Elke. "What do you think?" ■ "I think we'll leave you at home from now on," she says.

STUBBORN IS AS STUBBORN DOES

Last winter, Chris refused to spend another season with his parents climbing at The Gallery in Red Rocks, Nevada — he could already redpoint every route in his approach shoes. A compromise unfolded: In exchange for driving him to climb at Mt. Potosi, Nevada, each weekend, Chris would give two solid attempts on the Annihilator, a 5.14c project. "Part of the deal was he would submit to me pushing him," says Tom. "I don't remember that part," counters Chris. ■ Chris struggled with the route for two months, unable to find the necessary mental stamina. What Chris called mental fatigue, Tom interpreted as the lazies. "There were some serious shouting matches," says Tom. "I would be encouraging him, strongly, to do extra linkage." What Tom called encouragement, Chris interpreted as force. "Sometimes I would just let go," says Chris. "I would do it to piss him off." ■ When Chris finally finished the route, everyone breathed a sigh of relief. "If he had quit, we might have a weaker relationship," says Tom. And Chris, who in one breath claims that climbing with his parents is miserable, respectfully admits, "I owe that one all to Tom. I would have given up long before that."