

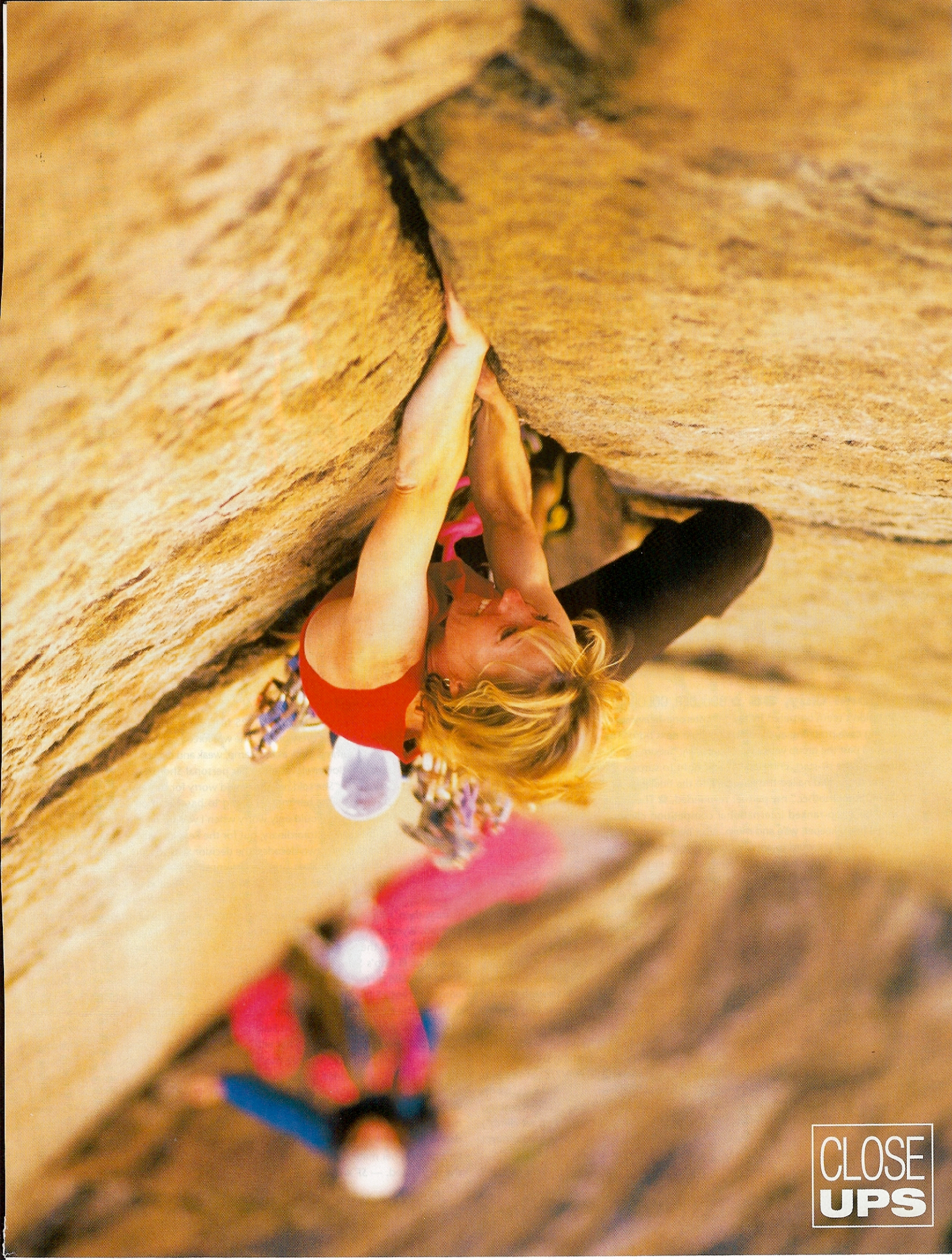


Sue Nott, 32 ♣ VAIL, COLORADO

"I wasn't even scared," says 32-year-old Sue Nott, recalling the time in 1998 when Seventh Tentacle, an ice pillar in Vail, Colorado, crumbled beneath her. A shard of ice through the abdomen caused severe internal injuries, and at the hospital, as her blood pressure plummeted, doctors declared her gone. ♣ Nott, however, had other plans: Not only did she survive, but she managed a full recovery, including climbing. "I never felt I would give up climbing," she says, adding that she spent her two-month hospitalization planning her rehab in Indian Creek. Just four months after the fall, she was off to climb in Peru. ♣ But Seventh Tentacle taught Nott an important lesson: "Before the accident, I focused only on going up," says Nott, admitting that she had relied on her more experienced partners for safety and technical expertise. After the fall, Nott was forced to start taking charge. "I had to learn to make V-threads, set up the ledge, bang pins, rap off a one-point anchor while in the dark or in a storm. Or, I wouldn't rise to the occasion." ♣ Nott's tenacity and willingness to learn is likely a leftover from her childhood training in the glamorous world of competitive figure skating. Ready for a new challenge, the adventurous Nott traded her blades for a cord and axes 12 years ago. "I don't like to put boundaries on who I am," says Nott. "I can psyche up for an epic alpine suffer-fest, or I can go hang out in Rifle." ♣ Indeed, though Nott is largely known for wielding tools — she recently ticked Mark Twight's Beyond Good and Evil in Chamonix and hung in there for Acid Howl (WI7 X) at Canada's Stanley Headwall — she's also climbed big walls in Patagonia, scored numerous first ascents in Alaska's Rogster Comb Range and climbed peaks in Peru and the Himalaya. ♣ After Seventh Tentacle, Nott teamed with Karen McNeil to summit Peru's 19,683-foot Chacaraju. "It was totally different," says Nott, referring to the ascent's girl-chemistry vibe. "There are times when we cry and aren't ashamed." ♣ Then, in 2000, Nott met Shivering, a 21,468-foot rock tooth in the Himalaya. Choosing the East Ridge, she and McNeil battled harsh conditions on the steep, mixed granite to become the fourth team up the route in two decades. Nott says she savored the brief moment on the summit, knowing, "Yes, I can go all the way to the top!" — *Stephanie Forte*

Roxanna Brock, 35 ♣ LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

At the 17,800-foot summit of Pakistan's Haina Brakk, there was nothing to protect Roxanna Brock from the extreme ambivalence she felt. After 21 days and 3,600 feet of climbing with her husband and another married couple, she was elated at their success on a new route — christened For Better or For Worse — and simultaneously aware of the huge toll it had taken. "I had to surrender to my surroundings," sighs the 35-year-old, drifting back to the isolation of the Karakoram, which magnified the ending of her marriage. ♣ Several months after returning home to Las Vegas, Brock and her husband divided their lives, parting as friends. Their seven-year relationship accounted for 80 percent of Brock's climbing career. "He was the first person I met who climbed with the same intensity that I do," she says. Though she had conquered big walls around the world, grabbed the first ascent of trad and sport climbs and red-pointed 5.13, Brock was in unfamiliar territory — alone — and she was scared. ♣ Though the intricacies of the rock have remedied many a climber's emotional wounds, Brock walked away: "I had to let go of climbing to let go of my husband." Her father had always preached the importance of a woman's independence (a sermon that prompted Brock to jump headfirst into the traditionally male-dominated worlds of chemical engineering and rock climbing), but now, Brock's fiercely independent nature became muddled in the haze of divorce. ♣ Eventually, after wading through an array of emotions, Brock's logical mind took charge. "I'm still a clear-minded person and can focus on the things in my control," she told herself and turned her attention to three simple words: independent, female, climber. Several months after her divorce, as the Mojave Desert came back to life after a hard winter, so did Brock. The excruciating stress-induced back pain that had made walking nearly impossible vanished, and Brock felt a new focal point emerging. "I needed to do something that I didn't believe I could do. I love pure crack climbing, so I finally settled on Desert Gold (5.13a)." ♣ Brock lingered over the flowers and cacti along the approach to the climb. "It made me realize how much I really love climbing," she says. Support from friends ("People would go out there just to belay me") and the process of failing made Brock's eventual success — Desert Gold's first female ascent — all the more important. "Desert Gold gave me my confidence back," she says. "I did it totally on my own." — *SF*



CLOSE
UPS



Naomi Guy, 35 ✦ BOULDER, COLORADO

She didn't seem bothered by the testosterone-heavy semicircle of guys in the bouldering cave preening and waiting for their next burn. The woman stepped up and pushed past the group with a flip of her wavy, auburn ponytail. Air thinning, she floated through the sit-start, crimped left and right to surpass the highpoint of every man in the circle, and nailed the sequence to the final jug. ✦ "Who is *that*?" I asked. ✦ "A lactating mother," my partner responded. ✦ The fact is, 35-year-old Naomi Guy may be a top-ranked international competition climber, but she's also a professional housekeeper, wife and mom. After her resounding send, she bolted out of the cave with nary a word to anyone. "When you have a kid, time is precious," Guy says. "I don't have time to gossip. Some people misinterpret me. They think I'm rude." ✦ Far from it, the friendly, though determined, expat came to the US from Bristol, England, in June 1996 for the X-Games. Though she didn't expect to be stateside long, she soon met Colorado-based climber Ned Harris, and "that was it." ✦ Guy, who won the Australian Open (1991) and topped the British national climbing championship twice (1993 and 1995/6), gave it up for bigger challenges: marriage and family. Harris and Guy wed on a volcano on Maui, Hawaii, in 1996. Guy gave birth to their daughter, Ruby, four years later. And today, Guy lives with her family on the outskirts of Boulder and drives a dapper blue mini-van. ✦ Though she still makes a strong showing at US bouldering competitions, these days, Guy spends her climbing time — what little she can find as a working mother — on real rock. "If it's going to take more than a couple days, I lose interest," Guy says. She ticked her hardest problems in a few tries: Sex After Death (V9), Something Different (V8) and Mr. Serious (V8) at Hueco Tanks, Texas; High Plains Drifter (V7/8) at the Buttermilks, California; Wicked Voodoo (V8, first female ascent) at Hound Ears, North Carolina; and Turning Point (V8/9) at Satellites, Colorado. ✦ Guy prefers climbing outside, but she says parenthood ("We don't put Ruby in child-care when we climb") makes the gym a necessity. If you run into her there and she ignores you, don't think her impolite — says Guy, "I just can't get sidetracked by talking."

— Pamela Emanoil

Nancy Feagin, 36 ✦ SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

Her lungs began to fill with fluid at 21,325 feet. Stricken by pulmonary edema, Nancy Feagin had to fight for every breath. She was forced to turn back, leaving behind her dream of Everest's summit. Back at basecamp, weak and exhausted, she surrendered her pack for the trip to lower elevation to her personal Sherpa, Martha Feagin, her 64-year-old mother. ✦ "She told me she would worry for three months," says Feagin of her decision to invite her mother along to basecamp on her 2001 Everest expedition. "This way, she would only worry when I was up on the mountain." The arrangement might seem extraordinary, but for the Feagins, whose lives have been altered by climbing for over two decades, the decision was second-nature. ✦ Nancy Feagin began climbing 21 years prior to attempting Everest, when her father, a doctor, offered a penniless climbing guide medical treatment in exchange for climbing lessons for his family. Martha, age 44, found an unknown love for the outdoors. Nancy, then 14, discovered a passion that would take her miles from her home of Jackson, Wyoming. ✦ Feagin went on to become the first and only woman to climb both El Cap (via the Nose) and Half Dome (via the Regular Route) in the same day, as well as El Cap's Salathé Route in a day. She's redpointed countless 5.13s and taken her skills on rock to the mountains, too. In her backyard, she made a one-day winter ascent of the Grand Teton. Farther afield, she ticked Chant de Cygne (V 5.12) on the Eiger and the Southeast Corner on Guillamet in Patagonia. The American Alpine Club recently recognized Feagin for her outstanding contributions to the climbing community, bestowing her with its prestigious 2002 Underhill Award. ✦ Chalk it up to Feagin's drive. Little more than a week after descending to recover from edema, Feagin decided to give Everest one more try. Friends and fellow climbers told Feagin that returning to elevation would mean her death. But Feagin persisted. ✦ On May 24, 2001, one month after abandoning her first attempt, Nancy Feagin became the 11th American woman to ever grace Everest's summit. Witnessing her daughter's victorious return to basecamp was emotional; Martha hugged her daughter tightly as her maternal instinct took over. "You don't ever have to do that again," she whispered. — SF ▲